



# Catechism

of the Coptic Orthodox Church



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2

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty





**Catechism**  
*of the*  
**Coptic Orthodox**  
**Church**

Volume 2, Books 4 – 7

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Sporting, Alexandria

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South Brunswick, NJ

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit*

*One God Amen.*

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Bishoy Boshra Behnam

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*H. H. Pope Tawadros II*





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**Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty**

1 / 1 / 2023

*Note: While the translators and editors have made every reasonable effort to find the sources cited in the Arabic manuscript and cite them more fully, unfortunately, some of them have proved rather difficult to pin down. Where this has occurred, the original citations from the Arabic have been left intact.*

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## Book 4

# Church Worship *as a* Journey to Heaven

1. Church Worship
2. The Life of Prayer
3. The Agpeya Prayers (the Canonical Hours)
4. The Model Prayer: “Our Father who art in heaven”
5. Prayer of the Mind and Contemplation
6. The Jesus Prayer or the Arrow Prayer
7. Metanoias and Prostrations
8. Holy Worship and the Full Life
9. Worship and the Fear of God
10. Holy Fasting
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13. Praise and the Heavenly Mindset
14. Church Hymns and the Heavenly Mindset
15. The Coptic Church Calendar and Joyful Daily Life in the Lord



# 1

## Church Worship

### 878. How can we worship the heavenly King of Kings?

Whether worshipping in the midst of the holy congregation (in church) or in his private room, a believer ought to be aware of Who it is to whom he offers worship, and who it is who is offering the worship. The Book of Revelation declares that the Lord is the Lord of Lords and King of Kings (Rev. 17:14). But at the same time, He has made us kings and priests to His God and Father (Rev. 1:6). We stand as kings before the King of Kings. We commit ourselves to manifest the signs of our kingship, as children of God the Father, and members of the body of Christ, being aware that we are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells within us. This awareness instills hope in us, hope in Him who is Almighty; and so we pray with boldness because He is the Lover of humanity.

I recall one of the servants in the Church of the Virgin Mary in Moharam Bek, Alexandria, used to repeat this prayer: “I will not accept from You anything less than to be an icon of You.”

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For the ruler when he comes before the king ought to have the symbol of his rule. As therefore no ruler without military girdle and cloak, would venture to appear before him that has the diadem: so neither do you without the symbols of your rule, pray before God, lest you insult both yourself and Him that has honored you.”<sup>1</sup>

### 879. Who are the true worshippers?

The Jews looked for the Messiah to come into Jerusalem, where the temple of Solomon was located, and where true worship would be offered when He came. As for the Samaritans, they believed that the Messiah would come on Mount Gerizim. This is why the Samaritan woman told Christ: “Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you Jews say that in Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship” (John 4:20). And the Lord answered her, “Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:21–24).

Thus, Jews and Samaritans were concerned with the *place* of worship, whether it should be in Jerusalem or on Mount Gerizim. But for the faithful of God, divinity is not limited to

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<sup>1</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 26.4 (NPNF I/12:153) amended.

any particular location. Thus, they raise their hearts with the spirit of worship wherever they are. Out of His love for humanity, God establishes a house for Himself in the midst of His people. However, when the believer stands in reverence, stretches out his hands, and lifts up his heart towards heaven, the depths of his soul rise up on high towards the throne heaven. He considers himself and his brothers and sisters who pray with him to have all ascended into communion with the hosts of heaven, and with the faithful who have departed from the world. This is what St. John the Beloved perceived in his revelation when he said, “I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held” (Rev. 6:9). “And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed” (Rev. 7:4).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Who then are the true worshipers? Those who confine not their service by place, and who serve God in spirit; as Paul says, ‘Whom I serve in my spirit in the Gospel of His Son’: and again, ‘I beseech you that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, acceptable unto God, your reasonable service’ (Rom. 1:9; 12:1). When He says, [to the Samaritan woman] ‘God is a Spirit’ [John 4:24] He declares nothing else than His Incorporeal Nature. Now the service of that which is incorporeal must need to be of the same character and must be offered by that in us which is incorporeal, to wit, the soul, and purity of mind. Wherefore He says, ‘they that worship Him, must worship Him in spirit and in truth’ ... Both Samaritans and Jews ... took great pains about the body, cleansing it in various ways, it is not, He says, by purity of body, but by that which is incorporeal in us, namely the mind, that the incorporeal One is served. Sacrifice then not sheep and calves, but dedicate yourself to the Lord; make yourself a holocaust, this is to offer a living sacrifice ... not preferring place to place, but giving them the precedence because of their intention.”<sup>2</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “But I do not presume to limit God’s omnipotence or to restrict to a narrow strip of earth, Him whom the heaven cannot contain. Each believer is judged not by his residence in this place or in that but according to the deserts of his faith. The true worshippers worship the Father neither at Jerusalem nor on mount Gerizim.”<sup>3</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “The one who is perfect and holy will go beyond even this as he worships the Father in a way that is more contemplative, clearer, and more divine. For just as the angels (as even the Jews would agree) do not worship the Father in Jerusalem because they worship the Father in a better way than those in Jerusalem, so those who can already be like the angels in their attitude will not worship the Father in Jerusalem but in a better way.”<sup>4</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “If God were body, it were right that He should be worshipped on a mountain, for a mountain is corporeal; it were right He should be worshipped in the temple ... It is a wonderful thing: He dwells on high, and yet is near to the lowly; ‘He has regard to lowly things, but lofty things He knows from afar’ (Ps. 138:6) ... Did you seek a mountain,

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<sup>2</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 33.2, 33.1 (NPNF I/14:115, 114).

<sup>3</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 58.3 (NPNF II/6:120).

<sup>4</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John (Books 13–32)* 13.98–99 (FOTC 89:88).



then? Come down, that you may come near Him. But would you ascend? Ascend, but do not seek a mountain. ‘The ascents,’ it says, ‘are in his heart, in the valley of weeping’ (Ps. 84:6). The valley is humility. Therefore do all within. Even if perhaps you seek some lofty place, some holy place, make yourself a temple for God within time. ‘For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are’ (1 Cor. 3:17). Would you pray in a temple? Pray in yourself. But be first a temple of God, for He in His temple hears him that prays.”<sup>5</sup>

### **880. What is the worship that is well pleasing to God?**

Worship that is pleasing to God is more than just performing certain practices — it requires a person to cling to the Savior in his daily life. He should not be content with the letter of the law, but rather enter into communion with God, and grow in the knowledge of Christ. This is what the Lord Christ revealed when He was asked, “‘What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?’ Jesus answered and said to them: ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.’” (John 6:28–29).

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “But it was necessary that He should show them that they were still very far removed from the worship most pleasing unto God, and that they knew nothing at all of the true good things, for cleaving to the letter of the law, they have their mind full of mere types and forms ... *The work* then of the pious soul is Christ-ward faith, and far more excellent is zeal for becoming wise in the knowledge of Him, than cleaving to the symbolic shadows.”<sup>6</sup>

### **881. What practical steps can we take to offer worship that is well pleasing to God?**

**First: Lift the heart up to heaven** where the soul meets the heavenly, and her longing for heavenly life grows. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “When you open the veil of the sanctuary, have faith that heaven too has opened its gates.”

Concerning worship on the Lord’s Day (Sunday), **St. Clement of Alexandria** locates the offering of the liturgy in the movements of one’s living spirit and in constant contemplation of the things of heaven, for the purpose of enjoying the glories of the Lord’s resurrection. He says, “He, in fulfilment of the precept, according to the Gospel, keeps the Lord’s Day, when he abandons an evil disposition ... glorifying the Lord’s resurrection in himself. Further, also, when he has received the comprehension of scientific speculation, he deems that he sees the Lord, directing his eyes towards things invisible ... So is he always pure for prayer. He also prays in the society of angels, as being already of angelic rank, and he is never out of their holy keeping; and though he prays alone, he has the choir of the saints standing with him ... And the form of his prayer is thanksgiving for the past, for the present, and for the future as

<sup>5</sup> St. Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 15.24–25 (NPNF I/7:105–106) amended.

<sup>6</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* Book 3, On John 6.29 (LFHCC 43:358) amended.

already through faith present ... He is ever giving thanks to God, like the living creatures figuratively spoken of by Isaiah.”<sup>7</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “‘Adore the Lord in his holy court’ (Ps. 28:2 LXX) ... Many assume an attitude of prayer, but they are not in the court because of the wandering of their mind and the distraction of their thoughts coming from vain solicitude. It is possible to consider the court in a still loftier sense as the heavenly way of life. Therefore, ‘They that are planted’ here ‘in the house of the Lord’ which is the Church of the living God [cf. 1 Tim. 3:15], there ‘shall flourish in the courts of our God’ (Ps. 91:14 LXX).”<sup>8</sup>

“‘The voice of the Lord is in power’ (Ps. 28:4 LXX) ... ‘The voice of the Lord in magnificence’ (Ps. 28:4 LXX). Magnificence is virtue extraordinarily great. He who performs great actions becomingly, such a one hears himself called magnificent. When the soul is not enslaved by the pride of the flesh, but assumes a greatness and dignity proper to it because of its awareness of its attributes received from God, in this soul is the voice of the Lord. Therefore, they who entertain noble thoughts of God, contemplating sublimely the reasons for creation, and being able to comprehend to a certain extent at least the goodness of God’s providence, and who besides are unsparing in their expenditures and are munificent in supplying the needs of their brothers, these are the magnificent men in whom the voice of the Lord dwells. In truth the magnificent man despises all bodily things, judging them deserving of no account in comparison with the unseen world. No difficult conditions will grieve the magnificent man; nor, in short, will any suffering greatly trouble him, nor will the sins of paltry and contemptible little men move him, nor the impurity of the flesh humble him. He is difficult of access to the humiliating passions, which cannot even look upon him because of the loftiness of his mind.”<sup>9</sup>

**Second: The believer knows himself.** He knows that he has become a child of God through baptism and that he is a member of the body of the only begotten Son. He is a temple of God, in which the Holy Spirit dwells; so, he converses with the Holy Trinity and practices his worship appropriately, confident in his communion with God.

**St. Anthony** says, “He who knows himself knows God, he who knows God must worship him as is proper.”<sup>10</sup>

**Lactantius** says, “piety is nothing else than the recognition of God as a parent.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.12 (ANF 2:545) amended.

<sup>8</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 13 (FOTC 46:198).

<sup>9</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 13 (FOTC 46:202–203).

<sup>10</sup> St. Anthony the Great, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, trans., Samuel Rubenson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 4.15: p. 211.

<sup>11</sup> Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 3.9 (ANF 7:77).

**Third: The believer knows his mission.** Lactantius says, “if any one should ask a man who is truly wise for what purpose he was born, he will answer without fear or hesitation, that he was born for the purpose of worshipping God.”<sup>12</sup>

**Fourth: The believer realizes that he is begotten of light.** He will not rest in darkness or ignorance. In speaking of the Christian practice of facing the east when praying, **St. Clement of Alexandria** affirms our new birth in Christ Jesus, the Sun of Righteousness, who dawns upon us: “And since the dawn is an image of the day of birth, and from that point the light which has shone forth at first from the darkness increases, there has also dawned on those involved in darkness a day of the knowledge of truth. In correspondence with the manner of the sun’s rising, prayers are made looking towards the sunrise in the east.”<sup>13</sup>

**Fifth: Attention to one’s internal and external purity.** **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Woman and man are to go to church decently attired, with natural step, embracing silence, possessing unfeigned love, pure in body, pure in heart, fit to pray to God. Let the woman observe this, further. Let her be entirely covered, unless she happen to be at home. For that style of dress is grave, and protects from being gazed at. And she will never fall, who puts before her eyes modesty ... Such ought those who are consecrated to Christ appear, and frame themselves in their whole life, as they fashion themselves in the church (1 Cor. 11:22).”<sup>14</sup>

“So it is said that we ought to go washed to sacrifices and prayers, clean and bright; and that this external adornment and purification are practiced for a sign. Now purity is to think holy thoughts ... For sanctity, as I conceive it, is perfect pureness of mind, and deeds, and thoughts, and words too, and in its last degree sinlessness in dreams. And sufficient purification to a man, I reckon, is thorough and sure repentance.”<sup>15</sup>

**Sixth: Commitment to a life of thanksgiving and praise** which endows the soul with true joy. **St. Anthony** says, “When you go to bed with a contented mind, recall the blessings and generous providence of God; be filled with holy thoughts and great joy. Then, while your body sleeps, your soul will keep watch; the closing of your eyes will bring you a true vision of God; your silence will be pregnant with sanctity, and in your sleep you will continue consciously to glorify the God of all with the full strength of your soul. For when evil is absent from man, his thankfulness is by itself more pleasing to God than any lavish sacrifice. To Him be glory through all the ages. Amen.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 3.9 (ANF 7:77).

<sup>13</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.7 (ANF 2:535).

<sup>14</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.11 (ANF 2:290).

<sup>15</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.22 (ANF 2:435).

<sup>16</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life” (attributed to St. Anthony) in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 170: p. 355.

“You should know that the body’s sufferings belong to it by nature, inasmuch as it is corruptible and material. The disciplined soul must, therefore, gratefully show itself persevering and patient under such sufferings, and must not blame God for having created the body.”<sup>17</sup>

**St. Clement** says, “‘Whatsoever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and His Father’ (Col. 3:17). This is our thankful revelry. And even if you wish to sing and play to the harp or lyre, there is no blame.”<sup>18</sup>

“You shall imitate the righteous Hebrew king in his thanksgiving to God. ‘Rejoice in the Lord, you righteous; praise is comely to the upright’ (Ps. 33:1–3), says the prophecy. ‘Confess to the Lord on the harp; play to Him on the psaltery of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song.’ And does not the ten-stringed psaltery indicate the Word Jesus, who is manifested by the element of the *decad*? [i.e., number ten which is represented by the letter Iota in the Greek numeral system, and the first letter of the word, Jesus or Ιησούς.]”<sup>19</sup>

“The Spirit, distinguishing from such revelry the divine service, sings, ‘Praise Him with the sound of trumpet’; for with sound of trumpet He shall raise the dead. ‘Praise Him on the psaltery’; for the tongue is the psaltery of the Lord. And ‘praise Him on the lyre’ (Ps. 150:3, 5). By the lyre is meant the mouth struck by the Spirit, as it were by a plectrum. ‘Praise with the timbrel and the dance,’ refers to the Church meditating on the resurrection of the dead in the resounding skin. ‘Praise Him on the chords and organ.’ Our body He calls an organ, and its nerves are the strings, by which it has received harmonious tension, and when struck by the Spirit, it gives forth human voices. ‘Praise Him on the clashing cymbals.’ He calls the tongue the cymbal of the mouth, which resounds with the pulsation of the lips. Therefore He cried to humanity, ‘Let every breath praise the Lord,’ because He cares for every breathing thing which He has made. For man is truly a pacific instrument.”<sup>20</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “He should give thanks to God, awful, glorious, and holy, and do nothing in a spirit of contention and vainglory (Phil. 2:3) but for God’s sake and to please Him; ‘for God has scattered the bones of them that please men’ (Ps. 52:6 LXX).”<sup>21</sup>

**Seventh: Prayer occurs in the human conscience.** **St. Basil** says, “But we do not rigidly confine our petition to words; nor do we imagine that God requires to be reminded by speech. He knows our needs even though we ask Him not. What do I say then? I say that we must not think to make our prayer complete by syllables. The strength of prayer lies rather in the

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<sup>17</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life” (attributed to St. Anthony) in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 72: p. 340.

<sup>18</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.4 (ANF 2:249).

<sup>19</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.4 (ANF 2:249).

<sup>20</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.4 (ANF 2:248).

<sup>21</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *A Discourse on Ascetical Discipline* (FOTC 9:35) amended.

purpose of our soul and in the deeds of virtue that extend to every part and moment of our lives.”<sup>22</sup>

**882. How can the body cooperate with the soul in sacred worship?**

As long as we live in this world, it is befitting for us to worship and glorify the Creator with our bodies as well as with our souls. Indeed, if the body is compared to the soul, the body is considered material and the soul spiritual; but one cannot glorify God without the other. The body worships with its members and the soul interacts with the body because there is no dualism in the human being. If the body ignores the role of the soul, worship turns into lifeless literalism; and if the soul tries to worship God while ignoring the body — even if the body is weary or sick — then its worship is incomplete. Each of them needs the other to offer sincere worship that is pleasing to God, the Creator of the body and soul.

**883. Is it preferable for a person to pray to God with cries, or an audible voice, or a quiet voice whispering, or to pray in silence?**

The words of the wise Solomon: “A time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (Eccles. 3:7), apply not only in our dealings with people, but also in our worship. There is a time for silence: when we sit with the Bible; or stand before the sanctuary, when we do not utter a word so that we may hear the voice of God within us. There is a time for quiet words: when we praise with the psalms, so that our hearts may be inflamed with heavenly joy and divine love. There is a time for a clear and audible voice: when we participate with the choir and the congregation in praise, and so we feel our longing to depart to paradise, that we may join the choir of heaven and the victorious believers who are departed. This is how the mouth assists the soul in its worship, whether through silence, whispering, or singing in an audible voice; and sometimes even by crying out. The psalmist says, “In my distress, I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears” (Ps. 18:6).

**St. Augustine** says, “‘In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God.’ St. Paul proclaims the fulfilment of this cry addressed to the Father, saying: ‘who, in the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death, and was heard because of His godly fear’ (Heb. 5:7). His cry was heard through His resurrection from the dead and His obtaining of the glory and the kingdom.”

“‘He heard my voice from His temple.’ He heard my voice from His dwelling in my heart! ‘And my cry came before Him, even to His ears.’ This cry of mine is not heard by the ear — but when I utter it within me in His presence, it reaches His ears!” And what is said of

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<sup>22</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta*, quoted in NPNF II/8:ilix.

the mouth and the tongue applies to the rest of the members of the body that contribute to the sacred worship of the Lord, cooperating with the soul, heart, and mind.

**884. How is beating one’s breast a way for the body to participate with the soul in worship?**

In the parable of the haughty pharisee and the humble tax collector, the latter was “standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me a sinner!’” (Luke 18:13). The actions of his body reveal the humility in his soul: his standing at a distance; his lowering of the eyes in shame before heaven; and his beating his chest. Through these actions he confessed that he was not worthy to approach the sanctuary. By bowing his head, he confessed his shame over those things of which he was guilty; and by beating his chest, he confessed that instead of welcoming the kingdom of God within him, he had opened the door of his heart to the devil, the enemy of good, and to sins. Here, the body and the soul cooperated together; and in humility, he confessed his need for God’s mercies if he was to receive the forgiveness of his sins.

In the “Paradise of the Fathers” we read that an elder once said, “Let us fast, pray, bow down, and beat our chests before the cross of our Lord. With tears and a broken heart, let us ask Him for help and salvation, for He is near to us at all times, and more so, He dwells within us, as it is written: ‘The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart’ (Ps. 34:18). The Lord also says: ‘Indeed, the kingdom of God is within you’ (Luke 17:21).” And **Abba Hipparchus** the priest says, “A monk who beats his chest and sheds tears draws down to himself the mercy of heaven.”

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “I have no favor before You, O You who searches my heart and my inner depths. I have no pure thoughts, nor tears in prayer; even if I sigh and fall on my face filled with shame, and beat my breast, which is the abode of passions and the workshop of evil thoughts.”

**St. Jerome** says, “The publican’s prayers overcame God (Luke 18:10–14), although God is invincible.”<sup>23</sup> “Pride is opposed to humility, and through it Satan lost his eminence as an archangel ... Think, brother, what a sin it must be which has God for its opponent.”<sup>24</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “But what of the publican? He stood, it says, ‘afar off,’ not even venturing, so to speak, to raise up his eyes on high. You see him abstaining from all boldness of speech, as having no right thereto, and smitten by the reproaches of conscience: for he was afraid of being even seen by God, as one who had been careless of His laws, and had led an unchaste and dissolute life. You see also that by his external manner, he accuses his own depravity ... he is afraid of his Judge, he smites upon his breast, he confesses his offenses, he shows his malady as to the Physician, he prays that he may have mercy. And

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<sup>23</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 16.1 (NPNF II/6:20).

<sup>24</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 12 (NPNF II/6:13).

what is the result? Let us hear what the Judge says, ‘This man, He says, went down to his house justified rather than the other’ [Luke. 18:14].”<sup>25</sup>

### **885. What are the blessings of a holy tongue? And what are the dangers of a corrupt tongue?**

The Holy Bible often warns us of the danger of not restraining our tongues. St. James the apostle says, “If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body. Indeed, we put bits in horses’ mouths that they may obey us, and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires. Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell” (James 3:2–6). With just a few words, a person may lose his salvation; and with just a few words a believer can become worthy to join the choir of heaven by the grace of God, as did the right-hand thief.

**St. Augustine** says, “Man tames the wild beast, yet he tames not his tongue! ... he tames all else, yet he tames not himself! He tames what he was afraid of, and what he ought to be afraid of, in order that he may tame himself, that he does not fear ... if no man can tame the tongue, we must have recourse to God, that He may tame it. For if you should wish to tame it, you cannot, because you are a man ... Therefore let God be sought, that man may be tamed. Therefore, ‘O Lord, You have become our refuge’ ... Shall the image of God [a human being] tame a wild beast; and shall not God tame His own image? In Him is our hope; let us submit ourselves to Him, and entreat His mercy ... and until we are tamed, and tamed thoroughly, that is, are perfected, let us bear with our Tamer. For oftentimes does our Tamer bring forth His scourge too. For if you bring forth the whip to tame your beasts, shall not God do so to tame His beasts (which we are), who of His beasts will make us His sons?”<sup>26</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** puts forward his positive view of the tongue that is holy in the Lord, and his awareness of the tongue’s power and superior capabilities. His character in the Lord influenced his view of the tongue, each of them supporting the other and elevating the other. Thus, he speaks of the gift of a holy tongue in these terms:

- a. With a holy tongue the believer participates in the praise of those in heaven.
- b. The one who possesses a holy tongue is a king with authority — the devil and his powers have no authority over him.
- c. A holy tongue utters the name of the inner kingdom, so that the believer experiences the promise of heaven with all his being, while still in this world.

<sup>25</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859): 120; p. 559 amended.

<sup>26</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 5.1–4 (NPNF I/6:273).

- d. A holy tongue is the harp of the Holy Spirit, by which the soul sings in harmony with the body.
- e. The secret behind a holy tongue is the wisdom of God which impels a person to rise from glory to glory by the work of the Holy Trinity in the body as well as in the heart, mind, and soul.
- f. A holy tongue is a fertile mother because of which the soul knows neither barrenness nor deprivation of spiritual virtues.
- g. A holy tongue in the Lord is blessed with divine treasures and the believer becomes an ambassador of the Lord.
- h. God cherishes the words of a holy tongue because it speaks divine truth.
- i. With a holy tongue we experience the resurrected life, for it challenges death and all its authority through fellowship with the Savior who is risen from the dead.
- j. Through unceasing praise, Christ is formed within us, and the soul becomes the bride of the holy Christ.
- k. By sanctifying the tongue, fasting is sanctified, and the believer is not enslaved by the desires of the stomach or by gluttony.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says,

“In his great beauty Adam was even more glorious than a crown,  
and among creatures there was no other beauty comparable to his ...

He fashioned a brain to be a home for his mind,  
so that it might reside in a lofty dwelling like a god.

He made for him a palate that he might be able to discriminate tastes,  
and He set taste therein that he might distinguish sweet from bitter ...

In his breast is the heart wherein all his thoughts are gathered,  
so that as if from a great storehouse it may put forth all its treasures.

Speech is through his mouth and with his lips the distinction of sounds.”<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Creation of Adam and the Resurrection of the Dead*, trans., Edward G. Mathews (Gorgias Press, 2014) Memra 72.3: p. 26.



**886. Why did the Lord Christ say, “Away with you, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve’” (Matt. 4:10; Luke 4:8; Cf. Deut. 6:13)?**

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Seasonably He made mention of this commandment, striking as it were his very heart. For before His advent, Satan had deceived all under heaven, and was himself everywhere worshipped: but the law of God, ejecting him from the dominion he had usurped by fraud, has commanded men to worship Him only Who by nature and in truth is God, and to offer service to Him alone.”<sup>28</sup>

God forbade the worship of anyone else but Him (Ex. 20:3–5; Deut. 5:6–9). When Nebuchadnezzar erected his golden statue and commanded all his subjects to fall down and worship the statue, the three saintly youths refused utterly to worship anything other than God, no matter what this would cost them; and so they were thrown into the fiery furnace. But the Lord preserved them, so that “[the king] saw these men on whose bodies the fire had no power; the hair of their head was not singed nor were their garments affected, and the smell of fire was not on them” (Dan. 3:27), because they obeyed God more than people.

God does not need humans or even heavenly beings to worship Him, but when His rational creatures in heaven and on earth worship Him in love and obedience, His splendor is reflected upon them.

**887. Why does the Holy Bible maintain that we must worship God and bow down before Him, for He is a jealous God?**

God wants us to love Him, to reign completely over our hearts — not because He wants to enslave us or subdue us, but because He is a “jealous God.” Therefore, He insisted on describing himself thus: “For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God” (Deut. 5:9). **St. John Chrysostom** comments on this phrase, saying, “He says, that you may learn the intenseness of the love. Let us then love Him as He would have us: for He sets great store thereby. And if we turn away, He keeps inviting us, and if we will not be converted, He chastens us through His affection, not through a wish to exact punishment of us. And see what He says in Ezekiel to the city that was beloved, yet had despised Him. ‘I will bring your lovers against you, and will deliver you into their hands, and they shall stone you, and shall slay you, and My jealousy shall be taken away from you, and I will rest, and I will not trouble Myself anymore’ (Ezek. 16:37–42). What more than this could a vehement lover have said, when despised by his beloved, and after all again ardently loving her? For God does everything that He may be loved by us, and owing to this He spared not even His Son. But we are unbending, and savage.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> St. Cyril or Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) Sermon 12, on Luke 4:5: p. 55.

<sup>29</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 23* (NPNF I/11:516).

**Origen** comments on the same verse, saying, “Behold the kindness of God! He himself assumes the weakness of human dispositions that he might teach us and make us perfect ... Every woman is either under a husband and has been subjected to the laws of the husband or is a prostitute and uses her freedom for sinning. He, therefore, who visits a prostitute knows that he has visited a woman who is a prostitute and is accessible to all who wish, and therefore, he cannot be angry if he sees other lovers also with her. But he who adopts lawful marriage does not permit his wife to make use of her power of sinning, but is inflamed with jealousy to preserve the purity of his marriage in which he can become a lawful father. By this example, therefore, let us understand that every soul has been prostituted to demons and has many lovers, so that the spirit of fornication now goes into it; when that spirit has left, the spirit of avarice enters, after this comes the spirit of pride, then of anger, then of envy, even later the spirit of vain glory and many others with these. All those thus commit fornication with an unfaithful soul. One does not envy another nor are they mutually moved by jealousy ... Just as we already spoke a little earlier about what is written in the gospel concerning that spirit which ‘went out from a man, and when it returned brought with it seven other spirits worse than itself so that they might live in one soul at the same time’ (John 11:26). Therefore, the soul which has been prostituted to demons experiences no jealousy between its lovers.

“But if the soul has been united with a lawful husband, with that husband to whom Paul united and joined souls in marriage as he himself also says, ‘For I established you with one husband to present you as a pure virgin to Christ’ (2 Cor. 11:2) — the statement in the Gospels, ‘A certain king made a wedding for his son’ (Matt. 22:2) is addressed to this same subject — therefore, when the soul gives itself to the marriage of this man and receives lawful marriage with him, even if she was a sinner at some time, even if she has been a prostitute, nevertheless, if she delivers herself to this husband, she is permitted no further sin. It cannot be tolerated that soul which has received a husband again sport with adulterers. The husband’s jealousy is stirred up over her; he defends the purity of his marriage. And ‘God’ is said to be ‘jealous’ because he does not permit the soul subjected to himself to be mingled with demons.”<sup>30</sup>

**888. Does the Holy Bible make it clear that it is not permissible to bow down for the purpose of worship, except before God alone?**

The Holy Bible in both Testaments often makes this principle explicitly clear. It also provides examples of angels and humans refusing to bow down in worship before anyone other than God. For example, in the Old Testament, the three saintly youths refused to worship the golden statue of the king (Dan. 3:12). Mordecai refused to bow down before Haman to worship him in the days of King Ahasuerus, which caused all the Jews to be sentenced to death, though the Lord saved them (Est. 3:5–6). In the New Testament, the angel

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<sup>30</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 8.5 (FOTC 71:325–327).

who accompanied St. John the Evangelist prevented him from bowing down to worship him, saying, “See that you do not do that. For I am your fellow servant, and of your brethren the prophets, and of those who keep the words of this book. Worship God” (Rev. 22:9). St. Peter the Apostle did the same with Cornelius the centurion, saying, “Stand up; I myself am also a man” (Acts 10:25–26). The Lord Christ Himself commanded us: “For the Father is seeking such to worship Him ... in spirit and truth” (John 4:23–24); and as the apostle says, “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth” (Phil. 2:10).

**889. What forms of bowing in worship are acceptable before the Lord?**

The three forms of bowing in worship — bowing the head; bending the knees; and lowering the face until the forehead touches the ground — are acceptable before the Lord when one’s internal aim is to achieve the following goals, or at least some of them:

**First:** To feel the presence of God and be aware of God’s love for humanity and for heavenly beings, upon whom the splendor of God shines till they themselves become full of splendor in His eyes.

**Second:** To engage the soul of the believer in interaction with God’s saving work, so that she offers sincere repentance for her sins and trusts in the Forgiver of sins who endows righteousness.

**Third:** To humble the soul of the believer, so that she prays for all humanity to experience the wondrous salvation of God.

**Fourth:** To free the soul from selfishness, so that in our prostrations, we pray for all those who asked us to remember them in our prayers as well as those who did not ask.

**890. Does the Coptic rite distinguish between the three types of prostrations before God?<sup>31</sup>**

- a. At the beginning of the liturgical Absolution Prayer, the deacon says, “Bow your heads to the Lord,” and then the bishop or priest asks the Master and Lord to grant absolution to those present while they stand or sit with their heads bowed.
- b. In Great Lent and Jonah’s Fast, the priest or bishop begins the Matins supplications by calling out: “Let us bow [or bend] our knees,” and with every supplication, he says, “And bow your heads to the Lord.”

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<sup>31</sup> See Fr. Matthew the Poor, *Orthodox Prayer Life* (Arabic) (2012): pp. 642–646.

- c. During the epiclesis prayer (the descent of the Holy Spirit) the deacon cries out, “Worship God in fear and trembling” as we bow down before the Body and Blood of Christ.

These three types bear the same spirit and goal, although each type has something that distinguishes it from the other two. In his personal worship, a believer often practices more than one type. The early Church Fathers discuss their spiritual experiences in bowing down before God, for example:

First, bowing down as a sign of one’s surrender of his life to God: **St. Dionysius the Areopagite** says, “All those who are ordained to the ranks of the priesthood, or those who are nominated for it, are required first to approach the divine altar and bow before it in order to proclaim the submission and surrender of their lives to God from whom they receive their consecration.”

Second, bending the knees for the sake of God’s intervention in human life: **Eusebius of Caesarea** says of the Emperor Constantine in his last illness: “The emperor himself ... would seclude himself daily at a stated hour in the innermost chambers of his palace; and there in solitary converse with his God, would kneel in humble supplication, and entreat the blessings of which he stood in need.”<sup>32</sup>

### **891. What is the relationship between bowing down and the saving work of Christ?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “With each going down on the knee and rising up we indicate in deed that we have fallen through sin to the earth and are called up to heaven by the love of our creator.”<sup>33</sup>

### **892. What is the relationship between bowing down and prayer?**

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says:

“Bow down at the beginning of your prayers and beseech God with contrition and humility to grant you patience in prayer and control over thoughts.”

“Compel yourself to bow down before God [i.e., to perform *metanoias*], for it is this which enlivens the spirit of prayer.”

“Give yourself to prayer and you shall attain the sweetness of *metanoias* and continue in them with joy.”

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<sup>32</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Life of Constantine* 4:22 (NPNF II/1:545).

<sup>33</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On The Holy Spirit* 27.66 (PP 42:106).

**893. Does the Holy Bible mention bowing down for purposes other than worshiping God?**

It was said of Abraham that he “bowed himself to the people of the land, the sons of Heth” to express gratitude (Gen. 23:7, 12; 27:29) in a spirit of humility stemming from his sense of being a sojourner. Although the sons of Heth saw him as a prophet and a ruler or prince from God in their midst, he considered himself to be a sojourner and guest among them, and felt unworthy of their love and generosity; so he bowed down before them as a sign of his feelings of gratitude. Indeed, the children of God stand out, not for their love of power or reliance on ego; but for their spirit of love, meekness, and humility. Thus, the saying is fulfilled: “A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14). This hill is not a hill of haughtiness, but of God; established and founded on the Lord Christ Himself, the Giver of humility.

Jacob and his wives and children bowed down to his brother Esau to appease him and to drive away the spirit of anger (Gen. 33:3–6). Jacob led the procession, not in arrogance or violence, but in a spirit of humility. He bowed before his brother seven times, a symbol of perfect submission. So also does the Lord Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom and Head of the Church, lead the procession of victory with His humility; for He emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant and humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:6–8). He is the only begotten Son of God. He learned obedience by the things which He suffered (Heb. 5:8), and because He is one with His Father, He fasted, prayed, and knelt down, offering submission to Him on our behalf, so that our worship may be acceptable in Him.

Joseph’s brothers bowed down to him to apologize for what they had done to him (Gen. 37:10, 42:6, 43:26).

Moses bowed down before his father-in-law Jethro (Ex. 18:7). Jethro came with a heart glorifying God for His saving works; and Moses too, great among the prophets to whom God had endowed all these wonders, met his father-in-law with all humility: “Moses went out to meet his father-in-law and bowed down and kissed him” (Ex. 18:7). Moses’ gift of prophecy did not teach him arrogance towards others, but humility before his father-in-law, the pagan priest. Perhaps it was his humility that won Jethro over to the knowledge of the work of God.

Joshua bowed down before the commander of the army of the Lord, because his majesty inspired awe (Josh. 5:14).

Ruth fell on her face and bowed down to the ground and said to Boaz, “Why have I found favor in your eyes, that you should take notice of me, since I am a foreigner?” (Ruth 2:10). In humility, Ruth confessed that she was a stranger and did not deserve this generosity, and therefore became more beautiful in the eyes of Boaz, who recounted her virtuous deeds to praise her, saying, “It has been fully reported to me, all that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband, and how you have left your father and your mother

and the land of your birth, and have come to a people whom you did not know before” (Ruth 2:11). When she humbled herself before him, he reminded her of how she had left her first father, the devil; and her first mother, the sinful life in which she was raised; and left the land of her birth, namely her love for the world; and clung to Naomi, namely the spirituality of the law; and come to a people that she did not know before, namely, to fellowship with the heavenly beings who had previously been strangers to her, but now she was one of them, having attained a heavenly nature.

Many are they who bowed down to kings, princes, rulers, and others as an expression of respect, fear, reverence, or supplication (cf. 1 Chron. 29:20). David bowed down before King Saul with a spirit of humility (1 Sam. 24:8). Joab and then Absalom bowed down before King David (2 Sam. 14:22–33). Abigail bowed down before him (1 Sam. 25:23, 41) as did Ahimaaz (2 Sam. 18:28) and Bathsheba (1 Kings 1:16). Adonijah bowed down before Solomon asking for his pardon (1 Kings 1:53). Solomon bowed down to his mother Bathsheba in reverence and respect for her (1 Kings 2:19). And Lot bowed down before the two angels (Gen. 19:1).

#### **894. How do the demons strive to deceive the faithful to bow down before them?**

In the Paradise of the Fathers, we read, “Abba Hôr said, ‘I know a certain man in this desert ... there came to this man in a lying vision devils who were in the forms of horses and chariots of fire and numerous horsemen, as if they had come from a king, and they said to him, “You have become perfect in everything, O man, but now, bow down and worship me, and I will take you up [to heaven] like Elijah.” Then the monk said in his mind, “I worship the King and Redeemer every day, and if this creature were [a king] he would not ask me to worship him now.” And when he had said to him what was in his mind, “I have a King, and I worship Him always, and you are not a king,” immediately the Devil removed himself and was no more to be found.’ Now Abba Hôr told us these things because he wished to conceal his own rules and manner of life ... but the fathers who were always with him told us that it was Abba Hôr himself who had seen these things.”<sup>34</sup>

#### **895. What is our view of the inability to worship due to illness?**

**Amma Syncretica of Alexandria**, the disciple of St. Athanasius the Apostolic, makes the following points:

- a. We ought not be sad when we are unable to pray and praise because of illness; for we do not do these things as a routine work or duties we must perform, but as a support for our striving to eliminate evil passions. If our illness eliminates these passions and pleasures, we should worship as much as we are able, especially by offering a

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<sup>34</sup> *The Paradise of the Fathers, Volume 2*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (Seattle, Washington: St. Nectarios Press, 1984): pp. 335–336, amended.

sacrifice of thanksgiving to God. Our practice of asceticism aims to control our passions, and illness performs the same task, like a strong and effective medical treatment. Because of it, the body is struck with weakness, but the spirit remains willing and able to offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving and praise to God Almighty, the Lover of humanity.

- b. If a person is afflicted in his eyes, he should consider this to have occurred by the permission of God, so that his inner vision might enjoy the glory of the Lord “as in a mirror” (2 Cor. 3:18).
- c. If a believer is afflicted in his hands, let him thank God who grants him inner hands ready to fight the enemy of good (the devil).
- d. If he feels that his whole body is emaciated, let him offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God who preserves the health of his inner man and grants him a greater strength.

She says, “Let us not become aggrieved that through weakness and plague of the body we are not able to stand in prayer or sing with our voices; all these things are accomplished to our advantage, toward the purification of desires. For both fasting and sleeping on the ground have been prescribed to us because of shameful pleasures. Therefore if sickness blunted these things, toiling is superfluous. But why do I say superfluous? For just as through the better and stronger remedy for illness the accidents that bring ruin are put to sleep. And this is the great ascetic practice, which perseveres in illnesses and offers up thanksgiving songs to the powerful one. Are we deprived of our eyes? Let us not bear it heavily; for we have cast out the organs of insatiate desire, but we see with our inner eyes the glory of the Lord. Are we deaf and dumb? Let us give thanks for having cast out completely vain hearing. Have we suffered because of our hands? But we have the internal hands made ready for the war against the enemy. Does illness control our whole body? But the health of the internal person will greatly increase.”<sup>35</sup>

“If illness weighs us down, let us not be sorrowful as though, because of the illness and the prostration of our bodies we could not sing, for all these things are for our good, for the purification of our desires. Truly fasting and sleeping on the ground are set before us because of our sensuality. If illness then weakens this sensuality the reason for these practices is superfluous. For this is the great asceticism: to control oneself in illness and to sing hymns of thanksgiving to God.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup> “Pseudo-Athanasius’s Life and Activity of the Holy and Blessed Teacher Syncletica,” trans., Elizabeth A. Castelli, in *Ascetic Behavior in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed., Vincent L. Wimbush, 265–311. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 99; pp. 305–306.

<sup>36</sup> Ward, Benedicta. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984) Syncletica 8: p. 232.

## 2

# The Life of Prayer

### 896. What is prayer?

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Prayer is, then, to speak more boldly, converse with God.”<sup>37</sup>

**St. John Climacus** says, “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 ... a work of angels, the food of all the bodiless spirits, future gladness, unending activity, a source of virtues, a means of obtaining graces, invisible progress, food of the soul, the enlightenment of the mind, an axe against despair, a demonstration of hope, a cure for sorrow.”<sup>38</sup>

“Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.”<sup>39</sup>

“The benefit of prayer can be inferred from the assaults of the demons during the divine service; and its fruit from the defeat of the foe.”<sup>40</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Thus will you pray without ceasing, if you not only pray in words, but unite yourself to God through all the course of life so that your life be made one ceaseless and uninterrupted prayer.”<sup>41</sup>

The **Letter to Diognetus** says of Christians that “their days are passed on the earth, but their citizenship is above in the heavens.”<sup>42</sup>

### 897. How can we converse freely with God?

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Sit in the presence of the Lord every moment of your life, as you think of him and remember him in your heart. Otherwise, when you only see him after a

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<sup>37</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.7 (ANF 2:534).

<sup>38</sup> St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 28.1: p. 212.

<sup>39</sup> St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 28.5: p. 213.

<sup>40</sup> St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 28.61: p. 220.

<sup>41</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* quoted in NPNF II/8: p. lxix, amended.

<sup>42</sup> “Epistle to Diognetus,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings*, (Penguin Classics, 2000) 5: p. 145.



period of time, you will lack freedom of converse with him, out of shame; for great freedom of converse is born out of constant association with him.”<sup>43</sup>

### **898. How can we offer prayer that is acceptable before God?**

The purpose of prayer is to keep the relationship between God and the person alive and effective. Therefore, we should consider the following when we pray:

- a. Trust in God who has complete love for humanity, ability, wisdom, and knowledge (cf. Col. 2:2; Eccl. 8:17).
- b. Pray for the will of God in every matter, for He is the Pantocrator: “Thy will be done” (Matt. 6:10).
- c. Offer prayer from a heart that is unsoiled and pure.
- d. Begin every prayer with thanksgiving for the things that God has granted us, for there is no gift that is not increased except that which is received without thanksgiving, according to St. Isaac the Syrian.
- e. Believe in the verse that says, “Unless the lord builds the house, they labor in vain who built it” (Ps. 127:1).
- f. Acknowledge that divine grace works in synergy with human striving. The Lord saved the child Moses and at the same time He rewarded the two midwives for ignoring pharaoh’s evil decree (Ex. 1:20).

**St. Basil the Great** says, “There are conditions for a prayer to be answered: it must be according to the will of God (Matt. 26:39); we must be steadfast and persistent (Luke 11:8); we must realize that God’s wants us to reform our conduct, which is much more important than answering our prayers (Isa. 1:15); we must be aware of our unworthiness of that for which we ask (1 Chron. 17:4) or the unworthiness of those for whom we pray (Jer. 14:11); and that sometimes the lack of an answer to prayer is preferable to it being answered (2 Cor. 12:7) ... If all these conditions are met, then there is no doubt that God will answer our prayers.”<sup>44</sup>

**Abba Zeno** says, “If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *On Ascetical Life* (PP 11).

<sup>44</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Regulae Brevis Tractatae (The Short Rules)* 261 (PG 31:1257–1258).

<sup>45</sup> Ward, Benedicta. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984) Zeno 7: p. 65.

“**Abba Macarius** was asked, ‘How should one pray?’ The old man said, ‘There is no need at all to make long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one’s hands and say, ‘Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.’ And if the conflict grows fiercer say, ‘Lord, help!’ He knows very well what we need and he shews us his mercy.’”<sup>46</sup>

**Abba Isaac** says, “For so far will one be heard and obtain an answer, as he believes that he is regarded by God, and that God can grant it. For this saying of our Lord cannot be retracted: ‘Whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they shall come to you’ (Mark 11:24).”<sup>47</sup>

**St. John Cassian** says, “He is quite certain that his prayers will not be answered. Who is this wretch? It is he who prays and does not believe that he will receive an answer.”

### **899. What should you do if God answers your prayers for your brother or sister?**

**St. John Climacus** says, “Do not be puffed up if you have prayed for another and been heard, for it is his faith that has been strong and effective.”<sup>48</sup>

### **900. Why does God sometimes delay answering our prayers, and why does He sometimes not answer them at all?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “It may be that He delays answering a prayer so that your zeal and your desire to approach Him may be multiplied, and that you may appreciate the gift of God and guard it carefully when you have received it. That which a person receives with great effort, he strives to protect, lest in losing it his labor will have been in vain.”<sup>49</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “He, who was not willing to give [the unjust judge in Luke 18:2], gave what was asked, because the other did not faint in asking. How much more then shall that Good One give who exhorts us to ask, who is displeased if we ask not? But when at times He gives somewhat slowly, it is that He is showing us the value of His good things; not that He refuses them. Things which have been long desired, are obtained with the greater pleasure, whereas those which are given quickly, are held cheap.”<sup>50</sup>

“Some things, indeed, we wish because we are in Christ, and other things we desire because still in this world ... Abiding, therefore, ourselves in Him, when His words abide in us we shall ask what we will, and it shall be done unto us. For if we ask, and the doing follows not, what we ask is not connected with our abiding in Him, nor with His words which abide

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<sup>46</sup> Ward, Benedicta. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984) Macarius the Great 19: p. 131.

<sup>47</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.32 (NPNF II/11:398) amended.

<sup>48</sup> St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 28:37: p. 217.

<sup>49</sup> See St. Basil of Caesarea, *Const. Mon.* 1 (PG 31:1325–1338).

<sup>50</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 11.6 (NPNF I/6:296) amended.

in us, but with that craving and infirmity of the flesh which are not in Him, and have not His words abiding in them. For to His words, at all events, belongs that prayer which He taught, and in which we say, Our Father, who art in heaven (Matt. 6:9). Let us only not fall away from the words and meaning of this prayer in our petitions, and whatever we ask, it shall be done unto us ... But when His words abide only in the memory, and have no place in the life, the branch is not to be accounted as in the vine, because it draws not its life from the root.”<sup>51</sup>

**Abba Isaac**, the disciple of St. Anthony, says, “We sometimes ask for things opposed to our salvation and that we are most providentially refused our requests by Him who sees what is good for us with greater right and truth than we can. And it is clear that this also happened to the teacher of the Gentiles when he prayed that the messenger of Satan who had been for his good allowed by the Lord’s will to buffet him, might be removed, saying: ‘For which I besought the Lord thrice that he might depart from me. And He said to me, My grace is sufficient for you, for strength is made perfect in weakness’ (2 Cor. 12:8–9).”<sup>52</sup>

**Pope Gregory the Great** says, “why is it that Paul three times besought the Lord and did not merit to be heard, but was told: *My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness* (2 Cor. 12:9). Did the great preacher not ask in the name of the Son? Then why didn’t he receive what he asked? ... The Son’s name is Jesus. Jesus means ‘saviour’ or ‘saving.’ One who asks in the Saviour’s name asks what pertains to actual salvation. If what he asks for is not for his good he is not asking the Father in Jesus’ name. Hence the Lord says to his apostles while they were still weak, *Up to now you have asked nothing in my name* (John 16:24) ... That is the reason too why Paul was not heard. If he had been freed from temptation it would not have been of help to his salvation ... consider your requests, I beseech you, and see if you are asking in the name of Jesus, if you are asking for the joys of eternal salvation ... *Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things will be given you as well* (Matt. 6:33).”<sup>53</sup>

### 901. What are the effects of prayer?

**First:** The soul is inflamed with the love of God. **St. Basil** the Great says, “Prayers, too, following reading, take hold upon a fresher and more vigorous soul already stirred to a longing for God. And prayer which imprints in the soul a clear conception of God is an excellent thing. This abiding of God in our memory is the indwelling of God. Thus we become in a special manner the temples of God when earthly thoughts cease to interrupt our continual remembrance of Him.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>51</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 81.4 (NPNF I/7:346) amended.

<sup>52</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.34 (NPNF II/11:399).

<sup>53</sup> Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans., Dom David Hurst (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1990) 27: pp. 216–217.

<sup>54</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 2.4 (FOTC 13:9).

**Tertullian** says, “Prayer is alone that which vanquishes God [cf. Gen. 32:22–30; Matt. 11:12]. But Christ has willed that it be operative for no evil: He had conferred on it all its virtue in the cause of good. And so it knows nothing save how to recall the souls of the departed from the very path of death, to transform the weak, to restore the sick, to purge the possessed, to open prison-bars, to loose the bonds of the innocent. Likewise it washes away faults, repels temptations, extinguishes persecutions, consoles the faint-spirited, cheers the high-spirited, escorts travelers, appeases waves, makes robbers stand aghast, nourishes the poor, governs the rich, upraises the fallen, arrests the falling, confirms the standing. Prayer is the wall of faith: her arms and missiles against the foe who keeps watch over us on all sides. And, so never walk we unarmed. By day, be we mindful of Station; by night, of vigil. Under the arms of prayer guard we the standard of our General; await we in prayer the angel’s trump ... What more then, touching the office of prayer? Even the Lord Himself prayed; to whom be honour and virtue unto the ages of the ages!”<sup>55</sup>

**St. Hesychius of Jerusalem** says, “‘Oh, that I my request may be fulfilled before the Lord.’ Should my prayers ascend on high, my enemies would perish, and the righteous person would stand firm (Wisdom of Solomon 5:1); the net would be broken, and the bird would be liberated and fly freely (Ps. 124:7); the oppressors would bow their heads, and the oppressed would rejoice (Matt. 5:10–12).”

**Second:** Prayer propagates the spirit of inner joy. **St. Cyril the Great** says, “For it is, I affirm, the duty of those who set apart their lives for His service, not to be sluggish in their prayers, nor again to consider it as a hard and laborious duty: but rather to rejoice, because of the freedom of access granted them by God; for He would have us converse with Him as sons with a father. Is not this then a privilege worthy of being valued by us most highly? For suppose that some one of those possessed of great earthly power were easy of access to us, and were to permit us to converse with him with full license, should we not consider it as a reason for extraordinary rejoicing? What possible doubt can there be of this? When therefore God permits us each one to offer our addresses unto Him for whatever we wish, and has set before those who fear Him an honor so truly great and worthy of their gaining, let all slothfulness cease that would lead men to an injurious silence therein; and rather let us draw near with praises, and rejoicing that we have been commanded to converse with the Lord and God of all, having Christ as our Mediator, who with God the Father grants us the accomplishment of our supplications. For the blessed Paul somewhere writes, ‘Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ’ (2 Cor. 1:2). And He somewhere Himself said to the holy apostles, ‘Hitherto you have asked nothing in My Name: ask, and it shall be given unto you’ (John 16:24). For He is our Mediator, our Propitiation, our Comforter, and the Bestower of every request.”<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 29 (ANF 3:691).

<sup>56</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 119: pp. 551–552 amended.

**St. Nilus of Sinai** says, “Prayer is a remedy against grief and depression.”<sup>57</sup> “Do not grieve if you do not at once receive from God that which you ask. He wishes to benefit you still more by making you persist longer in your patient prayer before Him. For what can be higher than to address one’s converse to God and be in communion with Him?”<sup>58</sup>

**St. Hesychius of Jerusalem** says, “If you offer your prayers with a pure and blameless heart on behalf of any inappropriate act, and if you offer groanings for yourself before Him, you will encounter God. Instead of sorrow, you will have joy; instead of misfortunes, you will receive blessings; and the expressions on your face will be bright, like pure water ... You will no longer fear other defects, for God will cast them away from you. You will find rest from your troubles and thanksgiving for the calmness which will overshadow you. You shall not fear temptations, for you will be like one who found rest in a safe harbor; you will fear no billows, for the sea is not able to harm you.”

**Third:** By prayer, the divine commandments are fulfilled. **St. John of Dalyatha** says, “Our Lord said to Simon, chief of the Apostles: *I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of heaven*, that you may close and open to all whom you wish (Matt. 16:19) ... [prayer] wears itself out giving rest to the weary and when they have been refreshed sees that they not become weary again.”<sup>59</sup>

“Sanctify your bed by the descent of the Spirit over you and the fragrance of your members will be wafted like perfume.”<sup>60</sup>

“Through prayer, the mind is mingled with God. Through prayer, one can open the treasures of God and divide His spoils. Through prayer, one is made worthy of the vision of God, of entering within the clouds of the light of His greatness in the country of the spiritual beings. Through prayer, a person becomes the dwelling of God. Through prayer, the soul is united with Christ, and beholds the radiance of His great glory. Through prayer, the fire of Christ’s love is kindled in the soul and the heart burns with desire for God; this desire that burns away every lustful desire of one’s members. Through prayer, the soul exults in love and goes beyond her rank, and the world is cast out from her heart.”<sup>61</sup>

**Fourth:** Prayer expels foolish ideas from our thoughts. The biography of **Amma Syncletica** of Alexandria, the disciple of St. Athanasius, says, “Therefore we must clean our house continuously and look around, lest any of the soul-destroying insects might penetrate into the treasures of the soul; make holy through sacrificial fire the places with the divine

<sup>57</sup> Ward, Benedicta. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984) Nilus 3: p. 153.

<sup>58</sup> Nilus of Sinai, “153 Texts on Prayer” in *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, trans., E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1954) 34: p. 132.

<sup>59</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 12.2, 12.1: p. 54.

<sup>60</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 13.2: p. 64.

<sup>61</sup> Fr. Paphnutius el-Souriany (Arabic), pp. 35–36.

incense of prayer. For just as one casts out the poisonous animals with the more piercing quality of medicine, just so prayer with fasting chases away foul thought.”<sup>62</sup>

## 902. What practical steps lead us to practice prayer?

**First:** Focus your inner gaze on God, your heavenly Father. **St. Basil** says, “When you begin prayer, forget every creature, seen and unseen, and begin to praise God, the Creator of everything; for it is said, ‘So He said to them, “When you pray, say, Our Father”’ (Luke 11:2).”<sup>63</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Not everyone who prays ascends the mountain, for there is prayer that turns to sin (cf. Ps. 108:7). But whoever prays well, whoever lifts himself from the cares of earth to thoughts of Heaven, climbs to the topmost peak (cf. Ps. 23:3) and all his concern is things sublime. But there is no question of someone climbing to the top if he is loaded with anxious cares to get rich and to be a person of great importance. He is not going to reach the mountain-top if he is casting a covetous eye on some one else’s possessions. Only the person who seeks God will make the ascent; only the one who asks God to help him on his way. All great souls, all sublime and elevated souls, reach the top of the mountain. It is not simply to any and every one that the prophet says: ‘*Get up upon a high mountain, you who bring good tidings to Sion. Lift up your voice with strength, you who bring good news to Jerusalem*’ (Isa. 40:9). It is not with the footsteps of your body that you must climb this mountain, but by the sublimity of your deeds. Follow Christ in such a way that you yourself can be a mountain; for: ‘*Mountains are all around it*’ (Ps. 124:2).”<sup>64</sup>

**St. Evagrius** says, “When the mind no longer contains images of earthly things during prayer, it has become strong.”

**Second:** Regulate the needs of your body in harmony with the hours of prayer. Let prayer take priority over the needs of the body. **St. Basil** says, “When you take food to nourish your body, you can scarcely be induced to leave the table before you have fully satisfied your need and, except for an urgent reason, you will not readily do so. How much more eagerly ought you to linger over spiritual nourishment and strengthen your soul with prayer; for the soul is as far superior to the body as heaven is above the earth and heavenly things above those of earth. The soul is an image of heaven because the Lord dwells within it, but the flesh is of earth, wherein live mortal men and irrational beasts. Regulate the needs of your body, therefore, in conformity with the hours of prayer and be prepared to dismiss arguments which would draw you away from observance of the rule; for it is the way of the devils to urge us

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<sup>62</sup> “Pseudo-Athanasius’s Life and Activity of the Holy and Blessed Teacher Syncletica,” trans., Elizabeth A. Castelli, in *Ascetic Behavior in Graeco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook*, ed., Vincent L. Wimbush, 265–311. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990) 80: p. 298.

<sup>63</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Monast. Cap.* 1.

<sup>64</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press. 2001) 5.49: p. 131.

to be absent during the time of prayer on the pretext of a seemingly worthy reason, so that they may plausibly draw us away from saving prayer. Do not make excuses, saying, ‘Alas, my head! Alas, my stomach!’ alleging invisible proofs of nonexistent pain ... for the sake of taking rest. Rather, be constant in secret prayer which God beholds in secret and will repay you for openly (Matt. 6:18).”<sup>65</sup>

**Third:** When you are in church, speak only of that which glorifies God and do not be a chatterbox. **St. Basil** says, “‘The heavens show forth the glory of God’ (Ps. 19:1). The praise of God is a duty belonging to angels. This one duty, referring glory to the Creator, belongs to every army of the heavenly creatures. Every creature, whether silent or uttering sound, whether celestial or terrestrial, gives glory to the Creator. But, wretched men, who leave their homes and run to the temple, as if to enrich themselves somewhat, do not lend their ears to the words of God; they do not possess a knowledge of their nature, they are not distressed, although they have previously committed sin; they do not grieve at remembering their sin, nor do they fear the judgment; but, smiling and shaking hands with one another, they make the house of prayer a place of lengthy conversations, pretending not to hear the psalm which solemnly protests and says: ‘In the temple of God all shall speak his glory’ (Ps. 29:9). You not only do not speak his glory, but, you even become a hindrance to the other, turning his attention to yourself and drowning out the teaching of the Spirit by your own clamor. See to it that you do not at some time leave condemned along with those blaspheming the name of God ... Let the tongue sing, let the mind interpret the meaning of what has been said, that you may sing with your spirit, that you may likewise sing with your mind (1 Cor. 14:14). Not at all is God in need of glory, but He wishes you to be worthy of winning glory. Therefore, ‘What a man sows, he will also reap’ (Gal. 6:7). Sow glorification, that you may reap crowns and honors and praises in the kingdom of heaven. This statement, ‘In his temple all shall seek his glory,’ was made not unfittingly in a digression, because some in the temple of God talk endlessly until their tongue aches; and these enter without profit. Would that it might be only without profit and not with harm!”<sup>66</sup>

**Fourth:** Be earnest in prayer with faith and flee the distractions of the thoughts. **St. Basil** says, “We ought to pray for divine help, not with laziness or a scattered mind here and there. Such a person not only fails to receive what he asks, but even angers God. If a person stands before a ruler, his eyes are steady, inside and out, for fear of punishment; how much more should we stand before the Lord with alertness and awe? But if you are beset by a certain sin, you will not be able to pray steadily and with all your strength. Examine yourself, so that whenever you stand before God, your thoughts are fixed on Him, and God will forgive you; for it is not out of negligence, but out of weakness that you are unable to be present before Him as you ought. If you commit yourself to this, you will not leave Him until you receive. If you do not receive what you ask, this is because your request was inappropriate or lacking in faith, or because you offered your prayer negligently, or because you ask for things that

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<sup>65</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Renunciation of the World* (FOTC 9:28–29).

<sup>66</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 13 On Psalm 28 (FOTC 46:209–210).

are not good for you, or because you ceased from praying. Oftentimes, people ask: *Why do we pray? Is God ignorant of our needs?* Without doubt, He knows, and He gives us abundantly all temporal things even before we ask. However, we should first ask for the things that are good and for the kingdom of heaven, and thereafter we receive what we desire; but let us ask patiently and faithfully, ask for what is good for us, and let us not hinder our prayers by disobeying our consciences.”<sup>67</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “It is our duty therefore to ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:7), according to the words of the blessed Paul, as well knowing, and being thoroughly assured, that He Whom we supplicate is able to accomplish all things. ‘For let a man’ it says, ‘ask in faith, in nothing divided: for he who is divided is like a wave of the sea, troubled and blown about by the wind. For let not,’ it says, ‘that man think that he will receive anything of the Lord’ (James 1:6–9) ... for if you do not believe that He will incline unto you, and gladden you, and fulfill your request, do not draw near to Him at all ... But that God will incline His ear to those who offer Him their prayers, not carelessly nor negligently, but with earnestness and constancy, the present parable assures us. For if the constant coining of the oppressed widow prevailed upon the unjust judge, who feared not God, neither had any shame at men, so that even against his will he granted her redress (Luke 18:1–8), how shall not He Who loves mercy, and hates iniquity, and Who ever gives His helping hand to them that love Him, accept those who draw near to Him day and night, and avenge them as being His elect?”<sup>68</sup>

**Fifth:** Leave matters in God’s hands. **St. Augustine** believes that the secret behind God answering David’s prayers and giving ear to the words of his mouth (Ps. 54:2) is that David surrendered matters into God’s hands; leaving decisions in His hands: “For sick you are; do not dictate to the physician the medicines he may choose to set beside you. If the teacher of the Gentiles, Paul the Apostle, says, ‘For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought’ (Rom. 8:26) how much more we?”<sup>69</sup> He again says, “Let not a sick man draw back from the hands of the physician, let him not give advice to the physician. So it is with all these things temporal.”<sup>70</sup>

**Sixth:** Ask faithfully, not quarrelsomely. **St. Augustine** says, “Now the wholesomeness of faith is this, that it makes us seek, that we may find; ask, that we may receive; and knock, that it may be opened to us. Whereas the man who gainsays it, does really shut the door of God’s mercy against himself.”<sup>71</sup>

**Seventh:** Seek God Himself rather than worldly matters. Prayer, to **St. Augustine’s** mind, is the language of the soul’s longing for God. It is a manifestation of the heart’s desire.

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<sup>67</sup> See St. Basil of Caesarea, *Const. Mon.* 1 (PG 31:1325–1338).

<sup>68</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 119: pp. 552–553 amended.

<sup>69</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 54.5 (NPNF I/8:207) amended.

<sup>70</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 54.5 (NPNF I/8:207).

<sup>71</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on Man’s Perfection in Righteousness* 19.40 (NPNF I/5:174).



“Prayer is a mind that is full of love reaching out for God. It occupies the mind and heart, thought and will, knowledge and love. A perfect life for the good Christian is holy desire.”<sup>72</sup>

“For an easy thing it is for a man to desire anything of the Lord, and not to desire the Lord Himself; as if forsooth that which He gives could be sweeter than Himself that gives.”<sup>73</sup>

“For when you ask for temporal things, you ask for nothing. ‘Whoever shall drink of this water, shall thirst again’ (John 4:13) ... Ask what may suffice you; speak Philip’s language, ‘Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us’ (John 14:8). The Lord says to you, ‘Have I been so long time with you, and have you not known Me? Philip, he who sees Me, sees the Father also’ (John 14:9). Render then thanks to Christ, made weak for you that are weak, and make ready your desires for Christ’s Divinity, to be satisfied therewith.”<sup>74</sup>

“By the words, ‘if anything’ [you ask the Father in my name, I will give you (John 16:23)], should not be understood anything whatever, but anything that is not really nothing in connection with the life of blessedness. And what follows, ‘Hitherto you have asked nothing in My name,’ may be understood in two ways: either, that you have not asked in my name, because a name that you have not known as it is yet to be known; or, you have not asked anything, since in comparison with that which you ought to have asked, what you have asked is to be accounted as nothing.”<sup>75</sup>

“God does not forbid you to love these things, [but He wants you] not to set your affections upon them for blessedness, but to approve and praise them to this end, that you may love your Creator ... For this the bridegroom gives earnest, that in his earnest he may himself be loved. Well then, God gave you all these things: love Him that made them.”<sup>76</sup>

“Do not look for anything else from God, except God.”<sup>77</sup>

“Does he say, ‘I will confess to Your name, O Lord,’ because You give me fruitful manors, because You give me gold and silver, because You give me extended riches, abundant money, most exalted dignity? No. But what? ‘For it is a good thing.’ Nothing I find is better than Your name.”<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, Tr. on 1 John 4:6.

<sup>73</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 77.2 (NPNF I/8:360).

<sup>74</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 95.6 (NPNF I/6:543) amended.

<sup>75</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 102.2 (NPNF I/7:390) amended.

<sup>76</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John* 2.11 (NPNF I/7:474) amended.

<sup>77</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume IX: Sermons 306–340A*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1994) 331.4: p. 192.

<sup>78</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 54.10 (NPNF I/8:208) amended.

“Let us not, therefore, be prompt in arguments and indolent in prayers [for them]. Let us pray, dearly beloved, let us pray that the God of grace may give even to our enemies, and especially to our brethren and beloved.”<sup>79</sup>

“‘The Eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous’ (Ps. 34:15) ... I cry unto Him, and yet have tribulation. Only hold fast to His ways, and when you are in tribulation, He hears you. But He is a Physician, and still have you something of putrefaction; you cry out, but still He cuts, and takes not away His Hand, until He has cut as much as pleases Him. For that Physician is cruel who hears a man and spares his wound and putrefaction. How do mothers rub their children in the baths for their health; do not the little ones cry out in their hands? Are they then cruel because they spare not, nor hearken unto their tears? Are they not full of affection? .... So our God also is full of charity, but therefore He seems not to hear, that He may spare and heal us for everlasting.”<sup>80</sup>

“You have made us for Yourself and our heart is unquiet till it find rest in You.”<sup>81</sup>

**Eighth:** Pray for others. **St. Ignatius of Antioch** says, “And pray without ceasing on behalf of other men. For there is in them hope of repentance that they may attain to God.”<sup>82</sup>

### **903. Is it permissible for us to pray for bodily hardships to befall us?**

In answering the question, “Ought we then to pray that bodily distresses do not happen to us, or if we do fall into them, how ought we to bear them?,” **St. Basil the Great** says, “He made no distinction as to kinds of temptation, but commanded in general terms that we ought to *pray lest we enter into temptation*. But if we have succumbed to it, we should ask from the Lord that he give us *a way out, so that we may be able to bear it* (cf. 1 Cor. 10:13), and so be able to fulfil what was said: *he who endures to the end shall be saved* (Matt. 10:22; 24:13).”<sup>83</sup>

### **904. Why do we pray? Does God not know what we need?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “He undoubtedly knows [what we need] and He gives us abundantly all temporal things even before we ask. However, we should first ask for the things that are profitable and for the kingdom of heaven, and thereafter we receive what we desire; but let us ask patiently and faithfully, ask for what is good for us, and let us not hinder our prayers by disobeying our consciences.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on the Gift of Perseverance* 66 (NPNF I/5:552) amended.

<sup>80</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 34.19 (NPNF I/8:77) amended.

<sup>81</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 1.1.1 (FOTC 21:4) amended.

<sup>82</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* 10.1 (ANF 1:53) amended.

<sup>83</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 179: p. 265.

<sup>84</sup> See St. Basil of Caesarea, *Const. Mon.* 1 (PG 31:1325–1338).

**905. Are communal prayers necessary?**

The believer feels that he is in communion with his brothers and sisters in prayer even in his private room, and thus he prays for all and asks for their prayers on his behalf. **St. Basil** wrote to one of the widows, “be mindful of God and have the fear of Him in your heart, and invite all to a union with you in your prayers. For great is the assistance of those who are able to move God.”<sup>85</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “For if according to the Lord’s saying, that that which two shall have agreed upon on earth concerning anything which they shall ask, shall be done for them, as He says, by My Father, Who is in heaven, for: ‘Where two or three are gathered together in My Name, there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:19) ... how much less, where the full congregation is gathered in the Name of the Lord. Where the demand of all is unanimous, ought we to doubt that the Lord Jesus is there as the Author of that desire, and the Hearer of the petition.”<sup>86</sup>

“Believe, then, that the Lord Jesus is present at the invocation of the priest, Who said: ‘For where two or three are, there I am also’ (Matt. 18:20). How much where the Church is, and where His Mysteries are, does He vouchsafe to impart His presence!”<sup>87</sup>

**906. Is it helpful to prolong prayer?**

**St. Augustine** says, “In view of this, it is not reprehensible or useless to pray at length when one is free, that is, when the obligations of other good and necessary works do not prevent us, although even in those, as I said, we must always pray by that desire of the heart.”<sup>88</sup>

**907. What does the Lord Christ mean by saying, “ask ... seek ... knock” (Luke 11:9)?**

**St. Augustine** says, “In order that these three things—viz. asking, seeking, knocking—may be made clear, let us suppose, for example, the case of one weak in his limbs, who cannot walk: in the first place, he is to be healed and strengthened so as to be able to walk; and to this refers the expression He has used, ‘Ask.’ But what advantage is it that he is now able to walk, or even run, if he should go astray by devious paths? A second thing therefore is, that he should find the road that leads to the place at which he wishes to arrive; and when he has kept that road, and arrived at the very place where he wishes to dwell, if he find it closed, it will be of no use ... to this, therefore, the expression refers which has been used, ‘Knock.’”<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* 174 (FOTC 13:337).

<sup>86</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters* 63.3 (NPNF II/10:457).

<sup>87</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Mysteries* 5.27 (NPNF II/10:320).

<sup>88</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume II (83–130)* 130 (FOTC 18:391).

<sup>89</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 2.72 (NPNF I/6:58).

**Abba Dorotheos** says, “If we seek, we shall find; and if we ask God, he will enlighten us; for it says in the Gospel, ‘Ask, and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and it shall be opened to you’ (Matt. 7:7). ‘Ask,’ it says, that we may call for aid through prayer; ‘seek,’ that is, search out how virtue may be reached, what brings it about, what we ought to do in order to possess it. ‘Seek and you shall find’ means to inquire every day in this way into everything. To ‘knock’ is to carry out the commandments. Everyone knocks at the door with his hands; our hands are given to us that we may do something. We need, therefore, not only to ask, but to seek diligently and know what to do as the Apostle says, ‘Perfectly prepared for every good work’ (2 Tim. 3:17; Cf. 2 Cor. 9:8) ... So, therefore, that we may be ready for every good work, let us make all our preparations to do the will of God ‘with knowledge’—what he desires and in a way that pleases him.”<sup>90</sup>

**St. Severus of Antioch** says, “Perhaps by the word ‘knock’ he means seeking effectively, since one knocks with the hand and the hand is a sign of good works. Perhaps also these three may be distinguished in a different way. For it is the beginning of virtue to ask for the knowledge of the truth. The second step is to seek how we can walk on that path. The third step is when man attains virtue to knock at the door, that he may enter into the vast field of knowledge. One asks for these three things in prayer. ‘To ask’ means ‘to pray’ and ‘to seek’ means ‘to pray through the good deeds that we offer in a way that suits our prayers’ and ‘to knock’ means to persevere in prayer without ceasing.”

### **908. What does the Lord Christ mean when He says that a son asks for bread, fish, or an egg?**

Christ said: “If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him” (Luke 11:11–13).

**St. Augustine** believes that the bread signifies love, fish signifies faith, and the egg signifies hope, since we ought to ask our Heavenly Father to help us to love, have faith, and hope. He says, “faith is signified by the fish, either because of the water of baptism, or because it remains unharmed by the waves of this world; and the Serpent is opposed to it, because it craftily and deceitfully persuaded man not to believe in God. Hope is symbolized by the egg, because the chick is not yet alive but it will be, it is not yet seen but it is hoped for—‘for hope that is seen is not hope’ (Rom. 8:24);—and the scorpion is opposed to it because whoever hopes for eternal life forgets the things that are behind and stretches himself forth to those that are before (Phil. 3:13) since it is dangerous for him to look backward, and

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<sup>90</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, “On the Structure and Harmony of the Virtues of the Soul” in *Discourses and Sayings*. Cistercian Studies Series: Number 33, trans., Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977): pp. 206–207.

he is on guard against the rear of the scorpion, which has a poisoned dart in its tail. Charity is symbolized by bread, for ‘the greater of these is charity’ (1 Cor. 13:13), and among foods bread certainly surpasses all others in value; the stone is opposed to it because the stony-hearted cast out charity.”<sup>91</sup>

### **909. What are the different types of prayer?**

**St. Aphrahat** says, “I will demonstrate you the seasons of prayer. For there is petition, thanksgiving and praise. In petition a person seeks mercy for his sins, in thanksgiving you give thanks to your Father who is in heaven and in praise you praise Him for His works. At the time of your distress, offer up a petition. At a time that you are provided with His good things, you should give thanks to the giver. At a time that the mind rejoices, offer up praise. You should pray all your prayers before God with discernment. See how David was always saying, ‘I have risen to give thanks to you for your righteous judgements’ (Ps. 119:62). In another psalm he had also said, ‘Praise the Lord from the heaven, praise Him in the heights’ (Ps. 148:1). Again he said, ‘I will bless the Lord at all times and His praises are in my mouth at all times’ (Ps. 34:1). He had prayed not using a single method (of prayer) but with difference.”<sup>92</sup>

### **910. Why did the martyrs cry out for vengeance on those who persecuted them (Rev. 6:10)?**

**St. Augustine** says, “as we read in the Apocalypse of John of the martyrs praying that they may be avenged (Rev. 6:10); while the well-known first martyr prayed that those who stoned him should be pardoned ... the dominion of sin is destroyed and overthrown, partly by the amendment of men, so that the flesh is brought under subjection to the spirit; partly by the condemnation of those who persevere in sin, so that they are righteously disposed of in such a way that they cannot be troublesome to the righteous who reign with Christ ... And they who pray for this, on the one hand pray for their enemies who are curable, and on the other hand do not pray against those who have chosen to be incurable.”<sup>93</sup>

### **911. Why are we taught not to repeat words in vain when we pray (Matt. 6:7)?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Our Lord first of all cut off ‘much speaking,’ that you might not bring a multitude of words unto God, as though by your many words you would teach Him. Therefore when you pray you have need of piety, not of wordiness. ‘For your Father knows what is needful for you, before you ask Him’ [Matt. 6:8]. But lest perhaps any should say here, ‘If He knows what is needful for us, why should we use so much as a few words? Why

<sup>91</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo *Letters, Volume II (83–130)* 130 (FOTC 18:388–389).

<sup>92</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.17 : p. 92.

<sup>93</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 2.22.76–77 (NPNF I/6:32).

should we pray at all?’ He knows Himself; let Him then give what He knows to be needful for us. Yes, but it is His will that you should pray, that He may give to your longings, that His gifts may not be lightly esteemed; seeing He has Himself formed this longing desire in us. The words therefore which our Lord Jesus Christ has taught us in His prayer, are the rule and standard of our desires. You may not ask for anything but what is written there.”<sup>94</sup>

### **912. What is the best request we can make of God?**

**St. Ambrose** says, “The Apostle found nothing better to wish us than this, as He himself said: ‘We cease not to pray and make request for you that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, walking worthily of God.’ He taught, then, that this was the will of God, that rather by walking in good works and words and affections, we should be filled with the will of God, Who puts His Holy Spirit in our hearts.”<sup>95</sup>

### **913. Should we pray for vengeance on heretics?**

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “But perchance some one will say, ‘But lo! Christ somewhere said to the holy apostles, “Love your enemies: pray for them who use you despitely” (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27): how then can we cry out against them [ask for revenge], without despising the divine command?’ ... Whenever offences are committed by any against us personally, let us immediately even count it our glory to be forgiving towards them, and full of mutual love; and imitating the holy fathers, even though they smite and scorn us, yes, even though they inflict violence upon us of every kind, let us free them from all blame, and be superior both to wrath and vexation. Such glorying becomes the saints, and is pleasing to God. But when any sin against the glory of God, heaping up wars and distresses against those who are the ministers of the divine message, then indeed let us at once draw near unto God, beseeching His aid, and crying out against those who resist His glory: just as also the mighty Moses did; for he said, ‘Arise, O Lord, and let Your enemies be scattered, and let all those who hate Your Name flee away’ (Num. 10:35). And the prayer also uttered by the holy apostles ... ‘For behold their threatenings,’ that is, prove their opposition to be in vain, and grant unto ‘Your servants, that with freedom of speech they may speak Your word.’”<sup>96</sup>

### **914. Why did the Lord Christ pray?**

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “for what, forsooth, does He [Christ] pray, if He is full, and needs nothing that is the Father’s? To this we reply, that He permits Himself, in accordance

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<sup>94</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.4 (NPNF I/6:275) amended.

<sup>95</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.7.89 NPNF II/10:105).

<sup>96</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 119: pp. 553–554.

with the manner of the dispensation in the flesh, to perform human actions whenever He wills, and as the season requires, without being liable to blame for so doing. For if He ate and drank, and is found partaking of sleep, what is there absurd, if also having humbled Himself to our measure, and fulfilled human righteousness, He not unfitly offered up prayer?”<sup>97</sup>

“All that Christ did was for our edification, and for the benefit of those who believe in Him; and by proposing to us His own conduct as a sort of pattern of the spiritual mode of life, He would make us true worshippers. Let us see, therefore, in the pattern and example provided for us by Christ’s acts, the manner in which we ought to make our supplications unto God. We must pray secretly and in concealment, and with no one seeing us: ... ‘But you, when you pray, go into your inner room’ (Matt. 6:6). For we ought to pray, not seeking after glory, but ‘lifting up holy hands’ (1 Tim. 2:8), while the soul, as it were, mounts aloft to the contemplation of God, withdrawing from all tumult, and quitting worldly anxiety. And this we must do not with fickleness, nor with a listless feebleness; but, on the contrary, with earnestness and zeal, and a patience worthy of admiration: for you have heard that Jesus did not merely pray, but that He also passed the night in this duty ... Though divinely begotten as the Word by God the Father, yet He humbled Himself unto emptying, even to becoming our brother, by being made like unto us, and similar in all things to the inhabitants of the earth, sin only excepted. For having become like unto us from His exceeding gentleness and love to mankind, He disdains not human things: but sets before us His conduct as a type of goodness unto the end, that we may be earnest in following His footsteps.”<sup>98</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “If He who was without sin prayed, how much more ought sinners to pray? And if He prayed continually, watching through the whole night with uninterrupted petitions, how much more ought we to watch nightly in constantly repeated prayer! The Lord prayed and asked not for Himself — for why should He who was guiltless pray on His own behalf?— but for our sins, as He Himself declared, when He said to Peter: ‘Behold, I Satan has desired that he might sift you like wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail’ (Luke 22:31–32).”<sup>99</sup>

“But if for us and for our sins He both laboured and watched and prayed, how much more ought we to be instant in prayers; and to pray and to entreat the Lord Himself, and then through Him, to make satisfaction to God the Father! We have an advocate and an intercessor for our sins, Jesus Christ the Lord and our God, if only we repent of our sins past, and confess

<sup>97</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 70: pp. 322 amended.

<sup>98</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part I*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 23: pp. 94, 96 amended.

<sup>99</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 29–30 (ANF 5:455) amended.

and acknowledge our sins, whereby we now offend the Lord, and for the time to come engage to walk in His ways, and to fear His commandments.”<sup>100</sup>

### **915. How can we gain the wisdom and understanding we need to manage our lives?**

**St. Justin Martyr** says, “But pray that, above all things, the gates of light may be opened to you; for these things cannot be perceived or understood by all, but only by the man to whom God and His Christ have imparted wisdom.”<sup>101</sup>

**St. Dionysius the Areopagite** says, “That is why we must begin with a prayer before everything we do, but especially when we are about to talk of God.”<sup>102</sup>

### **916. Is there a need for perseverance in prayer?**

**St. Evagrius Ponticus** says, “If you have not yet received the grace of prayer or of psalmody, the press ahead eagerly. You will gain hold of it ... Do not fall into despondency if at times you do not get what you ask for. Keep up your courage. It will come later.”<sup>103</sup>

“Know that the holy angels urge us in to pray. They are present with us amid rejoicing as they pray for us. So if we are careless and admit distracting thoughts we provoke them sharply inasmuch as they are joining in the fight on our behalf. On the contrary by this contempt of their services and by this forsaking of their God and Ruler we fall in with the designs of the impure demons.”<sup>104</sup>

“By true prayer a monk becomes another angel, for he ardently longs to see the face of the Father in heaven.”<sup>105</sup>

### **917. Should we be content with prayer only and neglect learning?**

**Abba Dorotheos** says, “If you wish that thoughts, holy in faith, should in time of need have a calming action in arresting wrong movements, thoughts, and feelings, study them always, frequently going over them in your mind—and I have faith in God that you will find peace. Also intersperse your prayer with study. Try to make progress in this, so that at a

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<sup>100</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *The Epistles of Cyprian* 7.6 (ANF 5:286).

<sup>101</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 7 (ANF 1:198).

<sup>102</sup> St. Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius), “The Divine Names” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., C. Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987) 3.1: p. 68.

<sup>103</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, trans., John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972) 87–88: p. 69–70.

<sup>104</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, trans., John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972) 81: p. 68–69.

<sup>105</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, trans., John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972) 113: p. 74.



moment of bodily or spiritual affliction you may be able to suffer it without grief, without oppression and with patience.”<sup>106</sup>

### 918. What is the connection between prayer and purity of heart?

**Pope Gregory the Great** was known for his love of the writings of the Eastern Fathers such as St. Athanasius and St. Cyril the Great, and thus he organized a group to translate their writings from Greek to Latin. He says:

“Now if we thoroughly wipe away these two [hands’ iniquity and wickedness in the tabernacle], we then directly ‘lift our face without spot’ to God. For the soul is the inner face of man, by which same we are known, that we may be regarded with love by our Maker. Now we are to lift up this same face, to raise the soul in God by appliance to the exercises of prayer. But there is a spot that pollutes the uplifted face, when consciousness of its own guilt accuses the mind intent; for it [the soul] is forthwith dashed from all confidence of hope, if when busied in prayer it be stung with recollection of sin not yet subdued. For it distrusts its being able to obtain what it longs for, in that it bears in mind its still refusing to do what it has heard from God. Hence it is said by John, *Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God; and whatsoever we ask we shall receive of Him* (1 John 3:21–22). Hence Solomon says, *He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination* (Prov. 28:9). For our heart blames us in offering up our prayers, when it calls to mind that it is set in opposition to the precepts of Him, Whom it implores.”<sup>107</sup>

“For they make their prayer to God, but never obtain to be listened to, who set at nought the precepts of the Lord, when He enjoins them. Whence it is written: *He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination* (Prov. 28:9). So long then as Eliphaz believed that blessed Job was not heard, he determined that that person had surely done wrong in his practice.”<sup>108</sup>

“God in his justice rejects iniquity, and does not accept sin (Job 14:17), but since He ministers our salvation, He longs for man, the work of His hands. In the midst of distress, Job cries out to God but it is as though God cannot hear him. However, when it is time for the resurrection, God will call him to rise and Job will answer; thus he encounters God who longs for the work of His hands, for Job will bear the reflection of the glory of God upon him.”

“*You shall call me, and I will answer You* (Job 14:15) ... For now so long as we are subject to corruption, we do not in any wise ‘answer’ our Creator, seeing that whereas

<sup>106</sup> St. Dorotheos of Gaza, “Directions on Spiritual Training” in *Early Fathers From the Philokalia*, translated from the Russian text, “Dobrotolubiye,” by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, eighth edition (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981) 106: pp. 176–177.

<sup>107</sup> Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* 1.10.27 (LFHCC 18:599) amended.

<sup>108</sup> Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* 1.16.26 (LFHCC 21:241).

corruption is far from incorruption, there is no similarity suitable to our answering. But of that change it is written *When He shall appear, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is* (1 John 3:2). Then therefore we shall truly ‘answer God,’ Who ‘calls,’ when at the bidding of the Supreme Incorruption we shall arise incorruptible; and because the creature is not able to earn this by itself, but it is brought to pass by the gift of Almighty God alone, that it should be changed to that exceeding glory of incorruption, it is rightly subjoined: *You will stretch forth Your right hand to the work of Your hands.*

“As if he said in plain words; ‘For this reason Your corruptible creature is able to hold fast unto incorruption, because he is lifted up by the hands of Your power, and is kept by the grace of Your regard, that he should hold fast.’ For the human creature by this alone, that it is a creature, has it inherent in itself to sink down below itself, but man has obtained it from his Creator, that he should both be caught above himself by contemplation, and held fast in himself by incorruption [cf. 1 Cor. 15:53]. And so that the creature may not fall away beneath himself, but hold on in incorruption, he is lifted to the steadfastness of immutability by the right hand of His Maker ... who can estimate the bountifulness of Divine Mercy, that He should bring man after sin to such a height of glory? God takes account of the bad things we do, yet by the grace of His lovingkindness He remits them to us in mercy. And hence it is added; *For now You number my steps, but You spare my sins* (Job 14:16).”<sup>109</sup>

### 919. What is the ultimate goal of prayer?

**First:** The ultimate goal of prayer is perfect communion with the Heavenly Bridegroom. **St. Macarius the Great** says, “As a wealthy maiden, betrothed to a husband, may receive ever so many presents before the marriage, ornaments, or dresses, or costly vessels, but is not satisfied until the time of the wedding comes and she is made one with him, so the soul, when it is engaged as a bride to the heavenly Bridegroom, receives as an earnest from the Spirit gifts of healings, it may be, or of knowledge, or of revelation, but it is not satisfied with these, until it attains the complete union, namely, charity, which can never change nor fail, which sets those who have longed for it free from passion and from agitation. Or as a babe that is decked with pearls and costly clothes, when it is hungry, thinks nothing of the things that it wears, but despises them, and cares only for its nurse’s breast, how it may get the milk; so reckon it to be, I pray you, even with the spiritual gifts of God. To whom be glory forever. Amen.”<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job* 1.12.18–19 (LFHCC 21:56–58).

<sup>110</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 45.7: p. 285.

“One thing is required, that a man should have treasure in his soul, and the life which is the Lord in his mind that whether he is working, or praying, or reading, he should have that possession which passes not away, which is the Holy Spirit.”<sup>111</sup>

**Second:** To experience the divine Presence. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “Wherever you may be, God will come to you if there are rooms of your soul that are suitable for His dwelling.”

**St. Dionysius the Areopagite** says, “The Trinity is present to all things, though all things are not present to it.”<sup>112</sup>

**St. Melito of Sardis** says, “Let Him, the ever-living God, be constantly present to your mind. For your mind itself is His likeness: for it too is invisible and impalpable, and not to be represented by any form, yet by its will is the whole bodily frame moved.”<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 3.3: p. 17 amended.

<sup>112</sup> St. Dionysius the Areopagite (Pseudo-Dionysius), “The Divine Names” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., C. Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987) 3.1: p. 68.

<sup>113</sup> St. Melito of Sardis, *A Discourse Which Was in the Presence of Antoninus Caesar* (ANF 5:753) amended.

### 3

## The Agpeya Prayers (the Canonical Hours)

### **920. The Psalmist prayed psalms that were relevant to his own circumstances; so why do I pray those same psalms when my circumstances may be different to his?**

In his letter to Marcellinus, **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** explains that the true believer finds the psalms familiar to him because his circumstances are in fact very similar to the circumstances of those who wrote the Psalms. He says in this letter, “There is also this astonishing thing in the Psalms ... he who takes up this book—the Psalter—goes through the prophecies about the Savior, as is customary in other Scriptures, with admiration and adoration, but the other psalms he recognizes as being his own words. And the one who hears is deeply moved, as though he himself were speaking, and is affected by the words of the songs, as if they were his own songs ...

“And it seems to me that these words become like a mirror to the person singing them, so that he might perceive himself and the emotions of his soul, and thus affected, he might recite them. For in fact he who hears the one reading receives the song that is recited as being about him, and either, when he is convicted by his conscience, being pierced, he will repent, or hearing of the hope that resides in God, and of the other succor available to believers—how this kind of grace exists for him—he exults and begins to give thanks to God ... on the whole, each psalm is both spoken and composed by the Spirit so that in these same words, as was said earlier, the stirrings of our souls might be grasped, and all of them be said as concerning us, and the same issue from us as our own words ... All this is to prevent falling into impiety on the part of the one who speaks strictly according to such phrases. For not only because of deeds, but also because of idle speech, we are obliged to render an account to the Judge.”<sup>114</sup>

### **921. The Agpeya prayers are arranged at certain hours of the day, so should a Christian adhere to a certain time for prayer?**

The incarnation of the Word of God, the Creator of time, and His participation in our temporal life, grants us the opportunity to unite with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6); but at the same time, to sanctify our earthly life, and time itself. Thus, the believer finds no duality dividing heavenly life from existence on earth, which is subject to time. Through his union with the Lord Christ, he obtains the right to enter the realm of heaven without despising time. There are people who — in their preaching about spirituality — attack every rite of worship and Church arrangement, apparently on the basis that the human being has completely cast off the flesh, or completely left the earth, and the believer is therefore no

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<sup>114</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The life of Antony and the letter to Marcellinus*, trans., Robert C. Gregg (Paulist Press, 1979) Letter to Marcellinus 11, 12, 15: pp. 109, 111, 114.

longer subject to time or structure. Thus, liberty becomes a justification for disarray under the guise of spirituality. But our Orthodoxy reconciles the heavenly dimension of human nature with the temporal earthly dimension in the person of the heavenly Christ who bore our nature and lived in our world. For this reason, while we seek continuous prayer without ceasing at a heavenly or angelic level, we do not ignore our reality in this world. Thus, we observe the prayers that the Church has set for us at certain hours, for they support and preserve us in Christ Jesus our Lord throughout our daily lives.

Concerning this, **St. Jerome** says, “Although the apostle bids us to pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5:17), and although to the saints their very sleep is a supplication, we ought to have fixed hours of prayer, that if we are detained by work, the time may remind us of our duty. Prayers, as everyone knows, ought to be said at the third, sixth, and ninth hours; at dawn and at evening.”<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the Church believes that canonical prayers are necessary, supporting and assisting the believer to practice continual prayer that never ceases.

God wanted the worship of His people in the Old Testament to be well-ordered and systematic; our own era of freedom certainly does not mean that we should live without order or system. **St. Clement of Rome** (30–100 A. D.) says, “These things therefore being manifest to us, and since we look into the depths of the divine knowledge, it behooves us to do all things in (their proper) order, which the Lord has commanded us to perform at stated times. He has enjoined offerings (to be presented) and service to be performed (to Him), and that not thoughtlessly or irregularly, but at the appointed times and hours. Where and by whom He desires these things to be done, He Himself has fixed by His own supreme will, in order that all things, being piously done according to His good pleasure, may be acceptable unto Him.”<sup>116</sup>

In the twenty-fifth chapter of his article “On Prayer,” **Tertullian** (second century) says, “Touching the *time*, however, the extrinsic observance of certain hours will not be unprofitable—those common hours, I mean, which mark the intervals of the day—the third, the sixth, the ninth — which we may find in the Scriptures to have been more solemn than the rest.”<sup>117</sup>

## 922. Were there prayers at canonical hours in the Jewish tradition?

Prayers at canonical hours are indeed present in Jewish tradition, based on the principle of sanctifying the hours of the day and night. Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947 at Wadi Qumran, is the “Manual of Discipline,” which dates back to before the advent of the Lord Christ. Here it is recorded that prayer should be performed “at the beginning of the dominion of light, and at its end when it retires to its appointed place; at the beginning of the watches of darkness when He unlocks their storehouse and spreads them out, and also at

<sup>115</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 22.37 (NPNF II/6:38); cf. Letters 107:9; 108:20; 130:15.

<sup>116</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 40 (ANF 1:15–16).

<sup>117</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 25 (ANF 3:689).

their end when they retire before the night, when the heavenly lights shine out from the dwelling place of Holiness, and also when they retire to the place of Glory.”<sup>118</sup>

This tradition is an inherently scriptural concept. It is the Holy Bible that teaches the pattern of designating a day dedicated for worship, namely the Sabbath, to be the sacrament that sanctifies the whole week, as a minimum requirement for devotion. In the same way, the Jews designated hours that are sanctified to the Lord throughout the day that support the person spiritually through the remaining hours of the day.

David the Prophet is considered a living example of unceasing prayer; he says of himself that he is prayer when he says, “I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved” (Ps. 16:8). At the same time, he provides a living example of performing the prayers of the hours when he says, “Seven times a day I praise you” (Ps. 119:164). He also relates that he would pray in the evening, morning, and at noon (Ps. 55:17). He spoke of the morning prayer: “My voice You shall hear in the morning, O Lord” (Ps. 5:3); of the sunset prayer: “Let ... the lifting up of my hands be as an evening sacrifice” (Ps. 141:2); of the night prayer: “I will not give sleep to my eyes ... until I find a place for the Lord” (Ps. 132:4–5); and of the midnight prayer: “At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You” (Ps. 119:62).

### **923. As Christians, are we required to observe Jewish tradition?**

No one can deny that Christianity adopted much from the Jewish heritage, having stripped it of its literalism that kills [see 2 Cor. 3:6], given it an anointing of the true Gospel, and purified it of all that contradicts the spirit of the Holy Bible. Thus, Christianity raised this tradition from its spiritual childhood to spiritual maturity. I have written elsewhere of the relationship between the Lord Christ and Jewish tradition.<sup>119</sup> The Church continues to sanctify certain hours of the day as a sign of sanctifying the whole day to the Lord.

At any rate, the Lord Christ Himself did not refrain from Jewish worship, but practiced it together with the Jewish people (Luke 4:16; Matt. 4:22) to bring them to the perfection of Christian worship. And so that no one would think that after the descent of the Holy Spirit on the disciples the Church was isolated from the Jewish heritage and Jewish worship, our teacher Luke the evangelist reminds us that they were “continuing daily with one accord in the temple” (Acts 2:46). Thus did they persisted in fellowship with the Jews in their daily worship through hymns, psalms, petitions, and readings from Scripture. But that was not the limit of their worship, for they gathered in the church (a house) to offer the mystery of the eucharist (Acts 2:47). The disciples would not have left the synagogues had the Jews not

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<sup>118</sup> Also known as the “Community Rule.” *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English* (revised edition), trans., Geza Vermes (Penguin Books, 2004): pp. 111–112.

<sup>119</sup> See Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Tradition and Orthodoxy* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1979).

insisted on their expulsion; while at the same time they were never bound in their worship by Jewish literalism that kills.

#### **924. Why is there no explicit commandment in the New Testament concerning the prayers of the canonical hours?**

The Holy Bible is not a book of regulations; otherwise, it would have set out exactly how the bishop, priest, and deacon are to be ordained, and how the sacrament of marriage should be performed. Many things were delivered orally (2 John 12). And if it were to contain such specific commandments about the canonical hours, any believer unable to practice one of these prayers due to circumstances would feel that he is breaking a divine commandment.

**Tertullian** mentions examples in the book of Acts (2:1, 5; 10:9; 3:1) where he observes the absence of any explicit commandments to pray the canonical prayers, although these prayers were steadfast principles in the life of the Church from its inception. He goes on to say, “Albeit these *practices* stand simply without any *precept* for their observance, still it may be granted a good thing to establish some definite presumption, which may both add stringency to the admonition to pray, and may, as it were by a law, tear us out from our businesses unto such a duty.”<sup>120</sup>

And in the same chapter he stresses the necessity of morning and evening prayers in addition to the other prayers, saying, “in addition to our regular prayers which are due, without any admonition, on the entrance of light and of night.”<sup>121</sup>

He also mentions the midnight prayer indirectly when he considers the status of a woman who marries a non-believing man, and questions how it is that she can arise from her bed at midnight to pray, thus casting her pearls before swine [i.e., praying before her unbelieving husband] (Matt. 7:6).<sup>122</sup>

#### **925. Did the faithful of the apostolic age observe the prayers of the canonical hours?**

We read in the **Didache**, “The Lord’s Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations”: “Do not keep the same fast-days as the hypocrites ... Your prayers, too, should be different from theirs. Pray as the Lord enjoined in His Gospel, thus: Our Father, who art in heaven ... Say this prayer three times every day.”<sup>123</sup> This document, which dates back to between 70 and 150 A. D., shows us that in the era of the apostles, the faithful prayed three times daily, although their precise timing was not yet specified, being a well-established practice inherited by the Church from Jewish tradition, which includes the prayers of the

<sup>120</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 25 (ANF 3:690).

<sup>121</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 25 (ANF 3:690).

<sup>122</sup> Tertullian, *To My Wife (Ad Uxorem)* 2.5 (ANF 4:46).

<sup>123</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 8: p. 194.

third, sixth, and ninth hours. Jungmann<sup>124</sup> believes that these prayers are based on Daniel the prophet (Dan. 6:10) who was accustomed to go to his house, open his windows towards Jerusalem, and kneel to pray three times a day.

The Didache does not mention the morning and night-time prayers, perhaps because the faithful would pray these communally, so there was no need to command the people to pray them. This is apparent in the **Didascalia's** commandment to bishops: “When you teach, command and remind the people, that they be constant in the assembly of the Church; so that you be not hindered, but that they be constantly assembled, that no one diminish the Church by not assembling, and make smaller by a member the body of Christ.”<sup>125</sup> The Didache mentions the Lord's prayer because while Christians were accustomed to participate in the synagogues in singing psalms and in the Jewish prayers, they could not share the Lord's prayer with them.

The Acts of the Apostles describes the practice of praying the canonical hours in the early Church. Of the **third hour** we read: “For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day” (Acts 2:15). Of the **sixth hour**: “Peter went up on the housetop to pray, about the sixth hour” (Acts 10:9). Of the **ninth hour**: “Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour” (Acts 3:1). And of the **midnight prayer**: “But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25).

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Prayer time should cover the whole of life, but since there is absolute need at certain intervals to interrupt the bending of the knee and the chanting of psalms, the hours appointed for prayer by the saints should be observed. The mighty David says, ‘I rose at midnight to give praise to you for the judgments of your justification’ (Ps. 119:62); and we find Paul and Silas following his example, for they praised God in prison at midnight (Acts 16:25). Then too, the same Prophet says: ‘Evening and morning and at noon (Ps. 55:17). Moreover, the coming of the Holy Spirit took place at the third hour, as we learn in the Acts when, in answer to the Pharisees who were jeering at the disciples because of the diversity of tongues, Peter said that they were not drunk who were speaking these words: ‘seeing that it is the third hour’ (Acts 2:15). Again, the ninth hour recalls the Lord's Passion, which took place that we might live (Matt. 27:45; Mark 15:33–34). But, since David says: “Seven times a day I have given praise to you, for the judgments of your justice” (Ps. 119:164), and the times for prayer which have been mentioned do not make up this seven-fold apportionment, the mid-day prayer should be divided, one part being recited before the

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<sup>124</sup> Josef Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy, to the Time of Gregory the Great*, trans., Francis Brunner (University of Notre Dame Press, 1959): p. 99.

<sup>125</sup> *The Didascalia Apostolorum in English*, trans., Margaret Dunlop Gibson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903) 13: p. 67.



noon repast and the other afterward. In this way, the daily seven-fold praise of God distributed throughout the whole period of the day may become a pattern for us also.”<sup>126</sup>

**926. Can we perform the duties of prayer during work?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “For prayer and psalmody, however, as also, indeed for some other duties, every hour is suitable ... Thus, in the midst of our work can we fulfill the duty of prayer.”<sup>127</sup>

**927. What does each of the canonical hours commemorate?**

**First: First Hour Prayer (Matins).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “each period contains a reminder peculiar to itself of blessings received from God. Prayers are recited early in the morning so that the first movements of the soul and the mind may be consecrated to God and that we may take up no other consideration before we have been cheered and heartened by the thought of God, as it is written: ‘I remembered God and was delighted’ (Ps. 76:4 LXX), and that the body may not busy itself with tasks before we have fulfilled the words: ‘To you will I pray, O Lord; in the morning you shall hear my voice. In the morning I will stand before you and will see’ (Ps. 5:4).”<sup>128</sup>

**Second: Third Hour Prayer (Terce).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “Again at the third hour the brethren must assemble and betake themselves to prayer, even if they may have dispersed to their various employments, recalling to mind the gift of the Spirit bestowed upon the Apostles at this third hour, all should worship together, so that they also may become worthy to receive the gift of sanctity, and they should implore the guidance of the Holy Spirit and His instruction in what is good and useful, according to the words: ‘Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right spirit within my bowels. Cast me not away from your face; and take not your holy Spirit from me. Restore unto me the joy of your salvation and strengthen me with a guiding spirit’ (Ps. 51:10–13). Again, it is said elsewhere, ‘Your good spirit shall lead me into the right land’ (Ps. 142:10 LXX); and having prayed thus, we should again apply ourselves to our tasks.

“But if some, perhaps, are not in attendance because the nature of place of their work keeps them at too great a distance, they are strictly obliged to carry out wherever they are, with promptness, all that is prescribed for common observance, for ‘where there are two or three gathered together in my name,’ says the Lord, ‘there am I in the midst of them’ (Matt. 18:20).”<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *A Discourse on Ascetical Discipline* (FOTC 9:212–213).

<sup>127</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:308).

<sup>128</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:308–309).

<sup>129</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:310).

**Third: Sixth Hour Prayer (Sext).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “It is also our judgment that prayer is necessary at the sixth hour, in imitation of the saints who say: ‘Evening and morning and at noon I will speak and declare; and he shall hear my voice’ (Ps. 55:17). And so we may be saved from invasion and the noonday Devil (Ps. 90:6 LXX), at this time, also, the ninetyeth Psalm will be recited.”<sup>130</sup>

**Fourth: Ninth Hour Prayer (None).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “The ninth hour, however, was appointed as a compulsory time for prayer by the Apostles themselves in the Acts where it is related that ‘Peter and John went up to the temple at the ninth hour of prayer’ (Acts 3:1).”<sup>131</sup>

**Fifth: Eleventh Hour Prayer (Vespers).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “When the day’s work is ended, thanksgiving should be offered for what has been granted us or for what we have done rightly therein and confession made of our omissions whether voluntary or involuntary, or of a secret fault, if we chance to have committed any in words or deeds, or in the heart itself; for by prayer we propitiate God for all our misdemeanors. The examination of our past actions is a great help toward not falling into like faults again; wherefore the Psalmist says: ‘the things you say in your hearts, be sorry for them upon your beds’ (Ps. 4:5 LXX).”<sup>132</sup>

**Sixth: Twelfth Hour Prayer (Compline).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “Again, at nightfall, we must ask that our rest be sinless and untroubled by dreams. At this hour, also, the ninetyeth Psalm should be recited.”<sup>133</sup>

**Seventh: Midnight Prayer (Vigil).** **St. Basil the Great** says, “Prayer time should cover the whole of life, but since there is absolute need at certain intervals to interrupt the bending of the knee and the chanting of psalms, the hours appointed for prayer by the saints should be observed. The mighty David says, ‘I rose at midnight to give praise to you for the judgments of your justification’ (Ps. 119:62); and we find Paul and Silas following his example, for they praised God in prison at midnight (Acts 16:25).”<sup>134</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “We read also in the gospel how the Lord spent whole nights in prayer (Luke 6:12) and how the apostles when they were shut up in prison kept vigil all night long, singing their psalms until the earth quaked, and the keeper of the prison believed, and the magistrates and citizens were filled with terror (Acts 16:25–38). Paul says: ‘continue in prayer and *watch* in the same’ (Col. 4:2) and in another place he speaks of himself as in watchings often (2 Cor. 11:27). Vigilantius may sleep if he pleases and may choke in his sleep, destroyed by the destroyer of Egypt and of the Egyptians. But let us say with David: ‘Behold, he that keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep’ (Ps. 121:4). So will the Holy

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<sup>130</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:310).

<sup>131</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:310).

<sup>132</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:310).

<sup>133</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:310).

<sup>134</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *A Discourse on Ascetical Discipline* (FOTC 9:212).

One and the Watcher come to us. And if ever by reason of our sins He fall asleep, let us say to Him: ‘Awake, why do you sleep, O Lord’ (Ps. 44:23); and when our ship is tossed by the waves let us rouse Him and say, ‘Master, save us: we perish’ (Matt. 8:25; Luke 8:24).”<sup>135</sup>

**928. What is the Church Fathers’ understanding of praying the Psalms (the prayers of the canonical hours of the Agpeya)?**

**First: St. Hippolytus of Rome** (second century).

He says, “If indeed you are at home pray at the third hour and praise God; but if you are elsewhere and that time comes, pray in your heart to God.”<sup>136</sup> We notice two things in this quote:

- a. The prayers of the canonical hours are not a matter for show before others. They may be prayed at home or in the heart during work without anyone else noticing.
- b. The phrase, “praise God” indicates an understanding of prayer as an act of praise, especially when using the psalms and hymns of the Church. It is a joyful act of the heart and not an obligation performed without the spirit of joy.

St. Hippolytus of Rome also speaks about the thoughts that should occupy the mind when praying the canonical hours. In his view, the third hour is for contemplation of the saving sufferings of Christ, since at this time, the process of crucifixion began in earnest.<sup>137</sup> He also refers to the showbread that was served at the third hour and the offering of the lamb at that time. At the sixth hour, the Lord was hung on the wood of the cross and the light of day was diminished, and it became dark (Matt. 27:45). Thus we pray with the spirit of triumph and victory over the power of darkness.<sup>138</sup> At the ninth hour the Lord was pierced in His side, blood and water flowed out (John 16:34), the darkness was dissipated, and there was light until evening. This was the dawn of a new day for us, for by falling asleep [dying] on the cross, He brought us into His resurrection.<sup>139</sup> As for the midnight prayer, he says, “And at

<sup>135</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 109.3 (NPNF II/6:213).

<sup>136</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.2: pp. 62–62 amended.

<sup>137</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.3: p. 63.

<sup>138</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.4: p. 64.

<sup>139</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.5 p. 65.

midnight rise and wash your hands with water and pray. And if you have a wife, pray together.”<sup>140</sup> Of this, he provides two interpretations:

- a. **The Natural Interpretation:** “And truly those men of holy memory (literally *elders*) who handed on the Tradition to us taught us thus: because in this hour every creature hushes for a brief moment to praise the Lord: stars and plants and waters stand still in that instant; all the hosts of the angels ministering (*leitourgia*) unto him together with the souls of the righteous praise God.”<sup>141</sup>
- b. **The Eschatological Interpretation:** “Wherefore it is right for all them that believe to be careful to pray at that hour. And testifying to this the Lord says thus, ‘Behold a cry was made at midnight of them that said, Behold the Bridegroom has come; arise, [go forth] to meet Him’ [Matt. 25:6]; and He adds, saying, ‘Watch therefore, for you know not in what hour He comes’ [Matt. 25:13].”<sup>142</sup>

**Second: St. Cyprian of Carthage** (second century).

St. Cyprian presents us with a vivid portrait of what should occupy the believer during prayer.<sup>143</sup> At the third hour he should remember the descent of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:15). At the sixth hour he should raise his heart toward heaven with Peter the Apostle who climbed up to the roof to pray and learned from a vision that God loves all humanity, and that none of them is unclean or impure (Acts 10:9). At the ninth hour, he should recall how the Lord washed away our sins with His blood on the cross and announced the fulfillment of His victory through His sufferings. At sunset, we should recollect our yearning for the presence of our sun Christ within us, and that He can never be hidden from us. And in the Matins prayer we remember the power of His resurrection.

**Third: St. Athanasius the Apostolic** (fourth century).

In *De Virginitate* (On Virginity), attributed to St. Athanasius the Apostolic, the author explains the observance of these prayers. We pray at the third hour, because at this hour they came to Him with the cross for Him to carry; at the sixth He was crucified for us; at the ninth hour He gave up the spirit. At the twelfth hour, our prayer before sleeping, the Lord

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<sup>140</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.8: p. 65 amended.

<sup>141</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.12: pp. 66–67.

<sup>142</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *The Treatise on the Apostolic Tradition of St. Hippolytus of Rome, Bishop and Martyr*, trans., Gregory Dix and Henry Chadwick (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1968) 36.13: p. 67 amended.

<sup>143</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* (ANF 5:447–457).

descended to the world of those who have slept; so we join them in rejoicing in His salvation. At midnight, we remember His resurrection from the dead.<sup>144</sup>

**Fourth: St. Basil the Great** (fourth century).

St. Basil emphasizes the importance of these prayers for our spiritual growth, saying, “None of these hours for prayer should be unobserved by those who have chosen a life devoted to the glory of God and His Christ.”<sup>145</sup> He explains their significance as follows:

1. **First Hour Prayer:** “Prayers are recited early in the morning so that the first movements of the soul and the mind may be consecrated to God and that we may take up no other consideration before we have been cheered and heartened by the thought of God, as it is written: ‘I remembered God and was delighted’ (Ps. 76:4 LXX) ... ‘in the morning you shall hear my voice. In the Morning I will stand before you and you will see’ (Ps. 5:4 LXX).”<sup>146</sup>
2. **Third Hour Prayer:** We remember the gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, and we ask Him to work in our lives: “Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me” (Ps. 50 LXX).
3. **Sixth Hour Prayer:** We fight against the demon of noon-day (i.e., drowsiness and lethargy) and pray for deliverance from him (Ps. 90).
4. **Ninth Hour Prayer:** This prayer is an apostolic tradition, received from the apostles Peter and John who at this hour went up into the temple to pray (Acts 3:1).
5. **Eleventh Hour Prayer:** “thanksgiving should be offered for what has been granted us or for what we have done rightly therein and confession made of our omissions, whether voluntary or involuntary, or of a secret fault, if we chance to have committed any in words or deeds, or in the heart itself.”<sup>147</sup>
6. **Twelfth Hour Prayer:** As night falls upon us, we pray that we may have rest without disturbance or illusions.
7. **Midnight Prayer:** We learn the need for this prayer from the apostles Paul and Silas when they were in prison: “And at midnight Paul and Silas praised God” (Acts 16:25). And the Psalmist says, “I rose at midnight to give praise to You for the judgments of Your justifications’ (Ps. 118:62 LXX).”

In common with some of the other Fathers of the Church, St. Basil the Great emphasizes the role of the Psalms in our spiritual life along the following principles:

<sup>144</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Enchiridion Ascet.* 221.

<sup>145</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:311).

<sup>146</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:309).

<sup>147</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:310).

**First:** The psalms provide sweetness on the narrow path of virtue. St. Basil says, “When, indeed, the Holy Spirit saw that the human race was guided only with difficulty toward virtue, and that, because of our inclination toward pleasure, we were neglectful of an upright life, what did He do? He devised for us these harmonious melodies of the psalms, that they who are children in age, or even those who are youthful in disposition, might to all appearances chant, but in reality, become trained in soul. For, never has any one of the many indifferent persons gone away easily holding in mind either an apostolic or prophetic message, but they do chant the words of the psalms, even in the home, and they spread them around in the market place, and, if perchance, someone becomes exceedingly wrathful, when he begins to be soothed by the psalm, he departs with the wrath immediately lulled to sleep by means of the melody.

“A psalm implies serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. For, it softens the wrath of the soul, and what is unbridled it chastens. A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider as an enemy him with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, charity ... It is the elementary exposition of beginners, the improvement of those advancing, the solid support of the perfect, the voice of the Church. It brightens feast days; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God. For, a psalm calls forth a tear even from a heart of stone.”<sup>148</sup>

**Second:** The psalms imbue the soul with inner peace. St. Basil says, “A psalm implies serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. This book is the book of love ... It is a weapon against the devil ... It is a cause of rest after the tiredness of the day ... It brightens feast days; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God ... It is the voice of the Church. A psalm is the work of angels, a heavenly institution, the spiritual incense.”<sup>149</sup>

**Third:** The psalms provide each person with the medicine of the soul that is appropriate for him. St. Basil says, “‘All scripture is inspired by God, and is useful’ (2 Tim. 3:16), composed by the Spirit for this reason, namely, that we men, each and all of us, as if in a general hospital for souls, may select the remedy for his own condition. For, it says, ‘care will make the greatest sin to cease’ (Eccles. 10:4). Now, the prophets teach one thing, historians another, the law something else, and the form of advice found in the proverbs something different still. But, the Book of Psalms has taken over what is profitable from all. It foretells coming events; it recalls history; it frames laws for life; it suggests what must be done; and, in general, it is the common treasury of good doctrine, carefully finding what is suitable for each one. The old wounds of souls it cures completely, and to the recently wounded it brings speedy improvement; the diseased it treats, and the unharmed it preserves.

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<sup>148</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 10.1–2 On Psalm 1 (FOTC 46:152–153).

<sup>149</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 10.1–2 On Psalm 1 (FOTC 46:152–153).

On the whole, it effaces, as far as is possible, the passions, which subtly exercise dominion over souls during the lifetime of man, and it does this with a certain orderly persuasion and sweetness which produces sound thoughts.”<sup>150</sup>

“A psalm is a city of refuge from the demons; a means of inducing help from the angels, a weapon in fears by night, a rest from toils by day, a safeguard for infants, an adornment for those at the height of their vigor, a consolation for the elders, a most fitting ornament for women. It is the elementary exposition of beginners, the improvement of those advancing, the solid support of the perfect, the voice of the Church. It brightens the feast days; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God. For, a psalm calls forth a tear even from a heart of stone. A psalm is the work of angels, a heavenly institution, the spiritual incense.

“Oh! the wise invention of the teacher who contrived that while we were singing we should at the same time learn something useful; by this means, too, the teachings are in a certain way impressed more deeply on our minds. Even a forceful lesson does not always endure, but what enters the mind with joy and pleasure somehow becomes more firmly impressed upon it. What, in fact, can you not learn from the psalms? Can you not learn the grandeur of courage? The exactness of justice? The nobility of self-control? The perfection of prudence? A manner of penance? The measure of patience? And whatever other good things you might mention? There in is perfect theology, a prediction of the coming of Christ in the flesh, a threat of judgment, a hope of resurrection, a fear of punishment, promises of glory, an unveiling of mysteries; all things, as if in some great public treasury, are stored up in the Book of Psalms.”<sup>151</sup>

**Fourth:** The psalms are one of the arrows with which we pierce and destroy demons. **St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “The service of psalmody, the Lord’s Prayer to our heavenly Father, and the personal prayer that a person improvises asking for mercy, help, and salvation — these three are like three arrows by which demons are pierced and killed.”<sup>152</sup>

**Fifth:** The psalms support the believer in avoiding distraction of thought. **St. Evagrius** says, “To pray without distraction is a considerable achievement, but greater still is the ability to practise psalmody also without distraction.”<sup>153</sup>

## 929. What is the role of the psalms in monastic life?

**St. John Cassian** speaks of the role of the prayers of the canonical hours including the psalms and praises, in the monastic movement of Egypt. They were the appetizing table around which the monks gathered according to their communal orders. Hermits practiced

<sup>150</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 10.1 On Psalm 1 (FOTC 46:151–152).

<sup>151</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 10.2 On Psalm 1 (FOTC 46:152–153).

<sup>152</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Part 1, Memre 5*.

<sup>153</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), trans., Robert E. Sinkewicz., ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford University Press, 2003) *Praktikos* 69: p. 109.

them in their caves in fellowship of praise and thanksgiving with the angels. In his work, *De coenobitarum institutis* or “The Institutes” addressed to Bishop Castor (419–426 A. D.) he discusses the prayers of the canonical hours (Agpeya) and vigil: “Put on, therefore, with this twofold girdle of which we have spoken, the soldier of Christ should next learn the system of the canonical prayers and Psalms which was long ago arranged by the holy fathers in the East. Of their character, however, and of the way in which we can pray, as the Apostle directs, ‘without ceasing’ (1 Thess 5:17), we shall treat, as the Lord may enable us, in the proper place, when we begin to relate the Conferences of the Elders [of Egypt].”<sup>154</sup>

“And so I think it best to set forth the most ancient system of the fathers which is still observed by the servants of God throughout the whole of Egypt, so that your new monastery in its untrained infancy in Christ may be instructed in the most ancient institutions of the earliest fathers.”<sup>155</sup>

In the fourth chapter, he describes the custom of praying exactly twelve psalms in the prayers of vespers and the night service, and of concluding the service with a reading from the Old Testament followed by a reading from the New Testament. This system is very old indeed, practiced and preserved unbroken. It was said that this system was brought down from heaven to the fathers by the ministry of an angel.

In the fifth chapter, Cassian explains that the Church of Alexandria was founded by the blessed evangelist St. Mark as bishop over it, and that many of its members sold all they had, offered it to the Church, and withdrew far from the towns to practice the life of solitude with asceticism and godliness. They organized their worship to avoid divisions. When they differed on the number of psalms that should be prayed, the following happened: “As they were going to celebrate their daily rites and prayers [at the time of the Vespers service], one [an angel] rose up in the midst to chant the Psalms to the Lord. And while they were all sitting (as is still the custom in Egypt), with their minds intently fixed on the words of the chanter, when he had sung eleven Psalms, separated by prayers introduced between them, verse after verse being evenly enunciated, he finished the twelfth with a response of Alleluia, and then, by his sudden disappearance from the eyes of all, put an end at once to their discussion and their service.”<sup>156</sup> Thus, St. John Cassian believes that praying psalms and the specific number of twelve psalms date back to the first century A. D.

In the seventh chapter, he talks about the practice of *metanoias* or prostrations during the service of the psalms. He says that the Egyptians were never in a rush to prostrate before the end of a psalm, unlike the monasteries of southern France where the monks seemed keen to quickly reach the end of the prayer. He says, “Among them, therefore, it is not so, but before they bend their knees they pray for a few moments, and while they are standing up spend the greater part of the time in prayer. And so after this, for the briefest space of time, they

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<sup>154</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.1 (NPNF II/11:205).

<sup>155</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.2 (NPNF II/11:205).

<sup>156</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.5 (NPNF II/11:207).



prostrate themselves to the ground, as if but adoring the Divine Mercy, and as soon as possible rise up, and again standing erect with outspread hands — just as they had been standing to pray before — remain with thoughts intent upon their prayers.”<sup>157</sup> No one dares to bend their knees before the leader bows down, and no one continues to prostrate after the leader stands up, lest it should be thought that they offered their own prayer independently and thus separated themselves from the community.

In the eleventh chapter, he tells us that the Egyptians “do not even attempt to finish the Psalms, which they sing in the service, by an unbroken and continuous recitation. But they repeat them separately and bit by bit, divided into two or three sections, according to the number of verses ... For they do not care about the quantity of verses, but about the intelligence of the mind; aiming with all their might at this: ‘I will sing with the spirit: I will sing also with the understanding’ (1 Cor. 15:15). And so they consider it better for ten verses to be sung with understanding and thought than for a whole Psalm to be poured forth with a bewildered mind. And this is sometimes caused by the hurry of the speaker, when, thinking of the character and number of the remaining Psalms to be sung, he takes no pains to make the meaning clear to his hearers, but hastens on to get to the end of the service. Lastly, if any of the younger monks, either through fervour of spirit or because he has not yet been properly taught, goes beyond the proper limit of what is to be sung, the one who is singing the Psalm is stopped by the senior clapping his hands where he sits in his stall, and making them all rise for prayer. Thus they take every possible care that no weariness may creep in among them as they sit through the length of the Psalms.”<sup>158</sup>

In the tenth chapter, he explains how the Egyptians were distinguished in their prayers by their silence. He says, “They are all so perfectly silent that, though so large a number of the brethren is assembled together, you would not think a single person was present except the one who stands up and chants the Psalm in the midst; and especially is this the case when the prayer is offered up, for then there is no spitting, no clearing of the throat, or noise of coughing, no sleepy yawning with open mouths, and gaping, and no groans or sighs are uttered, likely to distract those standing near.”<sup>159</sup>

“Their rule is that the prayer ought to be brought to an end with a speedy conclusion, lest while we are lingering over it some superfluity of spittle or phlegm should interfere with the close of our prayer. And, therefore, while it is still glowing the prayer is to be snatched as speedily as possible out of the jaws of the enemy, who, although he is indeed always hostile to us, is yet never more hostile than when he sees that we are anxious to offer up prayers to God against his attacks; and by exciting wandering thoughts and all sorts of snares he

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<sup>157</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.7 (NPNF II/11:208).

<sup>158</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.11 (NPNF II/11:209–210).

<sup>159</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.10 (NPNF II/11:209).

endeavors to distract our minds from attending to our prayers, and by this means tries to make it grow cold, though begun with fervor.”<sup>160</sup>

“Wherefore they (the fathers) think it best for the prayers to be short and offered up very frequently: on the one hand that by so often praying to the Lord we may be able to cleave to Him continually; on the other, that when the devil is lying in wait for us, we may by their terse brevity avoid the darts with which he endeavors to wound us especially when we are saying our prayers.”<sup>161</sup>

In his one hundred and thirtieth letter, **St. Augustine** confirms this, saying, “It is said that the brothers in Egypt have certain prayers which they recite often, but they are very brief, and are, so to speak, darted forth rapidly like arrows, so that the alert attention, which is necessary in prayer, does not fade and grow heavy through long-drawn-out periods.”<sup>162</sup>

### **930. Do hermits practice the prayers of the canonical hours?**

History tells us that even hermits (or anchorites) — the highest level of monastics — when they meet together, have nothing to talk about other than singing and praising God with the psalms and praises of the Church.

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<sup>160</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.10 (NPNF II/11:209).

<sup>161</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes*, 2.10 (NPNF II/11:209).

<sup>162</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Hippo Letters, Volume II (83–130)* 130 (FOTC 18:391).



## 4 The Model Prayer

*“Our Father who art in heaven”* (Matt. 6:9–15, Luke 11:2–4).

### 931. Why is the Lord’s Prayer important?

**St. Augustine** says, “The Son Himself, as you heard when the Gospel was read, taught His disciples and His faithful ones this Prayer. Good hope have we of obtaining our cause, when such an Advocate has dictated our suit. The Assessor of the Father, as you have confessed, who sits on the right hand of the Father; He is our Advocate who is to be our Judge. For from thence will He come to judge the living and the dead. Learn then, this Prayer also which you will have to repeat.”<sup>163</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “Let us, therefore, beloved brethren, pray as God our Teacher has taught us. It is a loving and friendly prayer to beseech God with His word, to come up to His ears in the prayer of Christ. Let the Father acknowledge the words of His Son when we make our prayer, and let Him also who dwells within in our breast Himself dwell in our voice. And since we have Him as an Advocate with the Father for our sins, let us, when as sinners we petition on behalf of our sins, put forward the words of our Advocate. For since He says, that whatsoever we shall ask of the Father in His name, He will give us (John 16:23), how much more effectually do we obtain what we ask in Christ’s name, if we ask for it in His prayer! (cf. John 14:6)”<sup>164</sup>

### 932. Why did the Lord Christ bid us to pray the Lord’s Prayer in the plural?

God bids us to love our neighbor, so we pray for fellow believers the same way we pray for non-believers. In so doing, our will is in harmony with the will of God, who wills all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:4). Even in his private room, the believer ought to pray in the name of the entire Church, because he is a member of the Church.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He teaches, moreover, to make our prayer common, on behalf of our brethren also. For He says not, ‘my Father, which art in Heaven,’ but, ‘our Father,’ offering up his supplications for the body in common, and nowhere looking to his own, but everywhere to his neighbor’s good.”<sup>165</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “You have begun to belong to a great family [by being baptized]. Under this Father, the lord and the slave are brethren; under this Father the general and the common soldier are brethren; under this Father the rich man and the poor are brethren. All

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<sup>163</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.1 (NPNF I/6:284) amended.

<sup>164</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 3 (ANF 5:448).

<sup>165</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* Homily 19.6 (NPNF I/10:131) amended.

Christian believers have various fathers on earth, some noble, some obscure; but they all call upon one Father which is in heaven ... Therefore do they understand that they are brethren, seeing they have one Father. Now let not the lord disdain to have his slave for a brother, seeing the Lord Christ has vouchsafed to have him for a brother.”<sup>166</sup>

In a similar vein **St. Cyprian** says in his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer: “Before all things, the Teacher of peace and the Master of unity would not have a prayer to be made singly and individually, as for one who prays to pray for himself alone. For we say not ‘My Father, which art in heaven,’ nor ‘Give me this day my daily bread;’ nor does each one ask that only his debt should be forgiven him; nor does he request for himself alone that he may not be led into temptation, and delivered from evil. Our prayer is public and common; and when we pray, we pray not for one, but the whole people, because we the whole people are one. The God of peace and the Teacher of concord, who taught unity, willed that one should thus pray for all, even as He bore us all in one. This law of prayer the three children observed when they were shut up in the fiery furnace, speaking together in prayer, and being of one heart in the agreement of the spirit; and this the faith of the sacred Scripture assures us, and in telling us how such as these prayed, gives an example which we ought to follow in our prayers, so that we may be such as they were: ‘Then these three,’ it says, ‘as if from one mouth sang a hymn, and blessed the Lord’ (Hymn of the Three Young Men, Dan.3:51 LXX). They spoke as if from one mouth, although Christ had not yet taught them how to pray ... Thus, also we find that the apostles, with the disciples, prayed after the Lord’s ascension: ‘They all,’ says the Scripture, ‘continued with one accord in prayer, with the women, and Mary who was the mother of Jesus and with His brethren’ (Acts 1:14).”<sup>167</sup>

### 933. Why do we address God thus: “Our Father who art in Heaven”?

In our prayers, as children of God, it is fitting for us to raise our hearts to heaven and entreat Him who is heavenly, eternal, and divine.

**St. Augustine** says, “Parents sometimes when they have begotten one, or two, or three children, fear to give birth to anymore, lest they reduce the rest to being beggars. But because the inheritance which He promises us is such as many may possess, and no one is left in poverty; therefore has He called into His family the peoples of the nations, and the Only Son has numberless brethren; who say, ‘Our Father, which art in heaven’ (Matt. 6:9). Let us then consider, beloved, whose children we have begun to be; and let us live so as becomes those who have such a Father. See, how our Creator has condescended to be our Father!”<sup>168</sup>

<sup>166</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 9.2 (NPNF I/6:288) amended.

<sup>167</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 8 (ANF 5:449).

<sup>168</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.2 (NPNF I/6:280–281) amended.

“We have found then a Father in heaven; let us take good heed how we live on earth. For he who has found such a Father, ought so to live that he may be worthy to come into his inheritance.”<sup>169</sup>

“If our Father be there [in heaven], there is the inheritance prepared for us. But He is such a Father, that we can possess with Him what He gives. For He gives an inheritance; but He does not leave it to us by dying [as happens with legal inheritance]. For He does not depart Himself, but He abides forever, that we may come to Him.”<sup>170</sup>

“Remember that you have a Father in heaven. Remember that you are born of your father Adam to death but you are born again from God the Father unto life, and what you say, say in your hearts.”<sup>171</sup>

**Abba Isaac** says, “When then we confess with our mouths that the God and Lord of the universe is our Father, we profess immediately that we have been called from our condition as slaves to the adoption of sons, adding next ‘Who art in heaven,’ that, by shunning with the utmost horror all lingering in this present life, which we pass upon this earth as a pilgrimage, and what separates us by a great distance from our Father, we may the rather hasten with all eagerness to that country where we confess that our Father dwells, and may not allow anything of this kind, which would make us unworthy of this our profession and the dignity of an adoption of this kind, and so deprive us as a disgrace to our Father’s inheritance, and make us incur the wrath of His justice and severity.”<sup>172</sup>

**Origen** says, “everyone who says, ‘Our Father who art in heaven,’ ought not have ‘a spirit of servitude in fear, but a spirit of the adoption of children’ (Rom. 8:15). But the person who does not have ‘a spirit of adoption of sons’ and says ‘Our Father who art in heaven,’ lies when he calls God his Father since he is not a son of God.”<sup>173</sup> He also says, “If what we have said on prayer *without ceasing* (1 Thess. 5:17) is understood, then all our life must be a prayer *without ceasing* in which we say: *Our Father who art in heaven*. Let us in no way have *our citizenship* upon earth (cf. Phil. 3:20), but in every way *in the heavens* which are God’s thrones; for God’s kingdom is built on all those who bear *the image of the Heavenly One* (1 Cor. 15:49) and so have become heavenly themselves.”<sup>174</sup>

**St. Athanasius** says, “But if He wills that we should call His own Father our Father, we must not on that account measure ourselves with the Son according to nature, for it is because of the Son that the Father is so called by us; for since the Word bore our body and came to be in us, therefore by reason of the Word in us, is God called our Father. For the Spirit of the

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<sup>169</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.2 (NPNF I/6:284) amended.

<sup>170</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 9.2 (NPNF I/6:288) amended.

<sup>171</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.5 (NPNF I/6:276) amended.

<sup>172</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.18 (NPNF II/11:393).

<sup>173</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew*. Vol. 2, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) Series 1–8, 2: pp. 542–543.

<sup>174</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *On Prayer* 22.5 (ACW 19:76).

Word in us names through us His own Father as ours, which is the Apostle’s meaning when he says, ‘God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father’ (Gal. 4:6).”<sup>175</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “But how great is the Lord’s indulgence! How great His condescension and plenteousness of goodness towards us, seeing that He has wished us to pray in the sight of God in such a way as to call God Father, and to call ourselves sons of God, even as Christ is the Son of God, a name which none of us would dare to venture on in prayer unless He had allowed us thus to pray! We ought then, beloved brethren remember and to know, that when we call God Father, we ought to act as God’s children; so that in the measure in which we find pleasure in considering God as a Father, He might also be able to find pleasure in us. Let us converse as temples of God, that it may be plain that God dwells in us.”<sup>176</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “O most surpassing loving-kindness of God! On them who revolted from Him and were in the very extreme of misery has He bestowed such a complete forgiveness of evil deeds, and so great participation of grace, as that they should even call Him Father. *Our Father, which art in heaven*; and they also are a heaven who *bear the image of the heavenly* (1 Cor. 15:49), in whom is God, *dwelling and walking in them* (2 Cor. 6:16).”<sup>177</sup>

The scholar **Tertullian** says, “Happy are they who recognize their Father! This is the reproach that is brought against Israel, to which the Spirit attests heaven and earth, saying, I have begotten sons, and they have not recognized me (Isa. 1:2) ... Again, in the Father the Son is invoked; for ‘I,’ says He, ‘and the Father are One’ (John 10:30). Nor is even our mother the Church passed by, if, that is, in the Father and the Son is recognized the mother, from whom arises the name both of Father and Son. In one general term, then, or word, we both honor God, together with His own, and are mindful of the precept, and set a mark on such as have forgotten their Father.”<sup>178</sup>

### 934. Why is the first supplication to the Lord: “Hallowed be thy name”?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Worthy of him who calls God Father, is the prayer to ask nothing before the glory of His Father, but to account all things secondary to the work of praising Him. For ‘hallowed’ is *glorified*.”<sup>179</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “The Name of God is in its nature holy, whether we say so or not; but since it is sometimes profaned among sinners, according to the words, ‘Through you My Name is continually blasphemed among the Gentiles’ (Isa. 52:5; Rom. 2:24), we pray that in us God’s Name may be hallowed; not that it comes to be holy from not being

<sup>175</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *De Decretis or Defence of the Nicene Definition* 7.31 (NPNF II/4:171–172).

<sup>176</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 11 (ANF 5:450).

<sup>177</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 23.11 (NPNF II/7:155)

<sup>178</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 2 (ANF 3:682) amended.

<sup>179</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.7 (NPNF I/10:131).

holy, but because it becomes holy in us, when we are made holy, and do things worthy of holiness.”<sup>180</sup>

### 935. Why pray “Hallowed be thy name” when He is already holy?

**St. Augustine** says, “When you ask that His Name may be hallowed, do you not, as it were, pray to Him for Him, and not for yourself? No. Understand it aright, and it is for your own self that you ask. For this is what you ask, that what is always in itself holy, may be hallowed in you. What is ‘be hallowed’? ‘Be accounted holy,’ be not despised. So then you see, that the good you wish, you wish for your own self. For if you despise the Name of God, for yourself it will be ill, and not for God.”<sup>181</sup>

“The Name of God is hallowed in you when you are baptized. Why will you offer this prayer after you have been baptized, but that that which you shall then receive may abide ever in you?”<sup>182</sup>

“If the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of the wicked, then, on the contrary, it should be hallowed and glorified because of the faithful and believers.”<sup>183</sup>

**Abba Isaac** says, “But where it is said ‘Hallowed be Your name,’ it may also be very fairly taken in this way: ‘The hallowing of God is our perfection.’ And so when we say to Him ‘Hallowed be Your name’ we say in other words, make us, O Father, such that we may be able both to understand and take in what the hallowing of You is, or at any rate that You may be seen to be hallowed in our spiritual converse. And this is effectually fulfilled in our case when ‘men see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven’ (Matt. 5:16).”<sup>184</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “After this we say, ‘Hallowed be Your name’; not that we wish for God that He may be hallowed by our prayers, but that we beseech of Him that His name may be hallowed in us ... We ask and entreat, that we who were sanctified in baptism may continue in that which we have begun to be. And this we daily pray for; for we need daily sanctification, that we who daily fall away may wash out our sins by continual sanctification ... [The Apostle] says that we are sanctified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the Spirit of our God. We pray that this sanctification may abide in us and because our Lord and Judge warn the man that was healed and quickened by Him, to sin no more lest a worse thing happens unto him, we make this supplication in our constant, we ask this day and night, that the sanctification and quickening which is received from the grace of God may be preserved by His protection.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 23.12 (NPNF II/7:155)

<sup>181</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.5 (NPNF I/6:275) amended.

<sup>182</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 9.3 (NPNF I/6:289) amended.

<sup>183</sup> *In Matthew* 6:9

<sup>184</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.18 (NPNF II/11:394) amended.

<sup>185</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord's Prayer* 12 (ANF 5:450).



### 936. Is He not the King of Kings? So why do we pray, “Thy kingdom come”?

**St. Augustine** says, “Come it surely will, whether we ask or not. Indeed, God has an eternal kingdom. For when did He not reign? When did He begin to reign? For His kingdom has no beginning, neither shall it have any end. But that we may know that in this prayer also we pray for ourselves, and not for God (for we do not say, ‘Thy kingdom come,’ as though we were asking that God may reign); we shall be ourselves His kingdom, if believing in Him we make progress in this faith. All the faithful, redeemed by the Blood of His Only Son, will be His kingdom.<sup>186</sup> And this His kingdom will come when the resurrection of the dead shall have taken place; for then He will come Himself. And when the dead are risen, He will divide them, as He says, and He shall set some on the right hand, and some on the left (Matt. 25:33). To those who shall be on the right hand He will say, ‘Come, ye blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom.’ This is what we wish and pray for when we say, ‘Thy kingdom come’; that it may come to us. For if we shall be wrongdoers, that kingdom will come to others, but not to us. But if we shall be of that number, who belong to the members of His Only-begotten Son, His kingdom will come to us, and will not tarry. For are there as many ages yet remaining, as have already passed away? The Apostle John has said, ‘My little children, it is the last hour’ (1 John 2:18). But it is a long hour proportioned to this long day; and see how many years this last hour lasts. But nevertheless, you be as those who watch, and so sleep, and rise again, and reign. Let us watch now, let us sleep in death; at the end we shall rise again, and shall reign without end.”<sup>187</sup>

“Therefore when we say, ‘Thy kingdom come,’ we pray that it may come to us. What is, ‘may come to us’? May find us good. This we pray for then, that He would make us good; for then to us will His kingdom come.”<sup>188</sup>

“... let that come even to us, which is to come to Your saints and righteous ones.”<sup>189</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says: “*Thy kingdom come*. If the kingdom of God, according to the word of Our Lord and Saviour, *comes not with observation; and neither shall they say: Behold here, or behold there—but the kingdom of God is within us* (Luke 17:20f) (for the word is very near unto us, in our mouth and in our heart) (Deut. 30:14; cf. Rom. 10:8): then it is clear that he who prays for the coming of the kingdom of God rightly prays that the kingdom of God might be established, and bear fruit and be perfected in himself (cf. Matt. 13:23; Mark 4:20; Luke 8:15) ... Let then *what is corruptible* in us *put on holiness and incorruption* in chastity and all purity and *what is mortal*, having conquered death, *put on the*

<sup>186</sup> Author’s note: However, there are those who after being redeemed by His Blood revert and apostatize, and therefore lose the kingdom; this is clear from the rest of St. Augustine’s sermon.

<sup>187</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.5 (NPNF I/6:281) amended.

<sup>188</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.3 (NPNF I/6:285).

<sup>189</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.6 (NPNF I/6:276) amended.

*immortality* of the Father (cf. 1 Cor. 15:53). Thus God will be reigning in us, and we shall already enjoy the benefits of regeneration and resurrection.”<sup>190</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “It is a repugnant thing for us to seek to live long in this world, as we ask that the kingdom of God should come quickly.”<sup>191</sup> He also says, “We ask that the kingdom of God may be set forth to us, even as we also ask that His name may be sanctified in us ... We pray that our kingdom, which has been promised us by God, may come, which was acquired by the blood and passion of Christ; that we who first are His subjects in the world, may hereafter reign with Christ when He reigns, as He Himself promises and says, ‘Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world’ (Matt. 25:34). Christ Himself, dearest brethren, however, may be the kingdom of God, whom we day by day desire to come, whose advent we crave to be quickly manifested to us. For since He is Himself the Resurrection, since in Him we rise again, so also the kingdom of God may be understood to be Himself, since in Him we shall reign. But we do well in seeking the kingdom of God, that is, the heavenly kingdom, because there is also an earthly kingdom. But he who has already renounced the world, is moreover greater than its honours and its kingdom. And therefore he who dedicates himself to God and Christ, desires not earthly, but heavenly kingdoms. But there is need of continual prayer and supplication, that we fall not away from the heavenly kingdom, as the Jews, to whom this promise had first been given, fell away; even as the Lord sets forth and proves: ‘Many,’ says He, ‘shall come from the east and from the west, and shall recline with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ (Matt. 8:11). He shows that the Jews were previously children of the kingdom, so long as they continued also to be children of God; but after the name of Father ceased to be recognised among them, the kingdom also ceased; and therefore we Christians, who in our prayer begin to call God our Father, pray also that God’s kingdom may come to us.”<sup>192</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “A pure soul can say with boldness, *Thy kingdom come*; for he who has heard Paul saying, ‘Let not, therefore, sin reign in your mortal body’ (Rom. 6:12), and has cleansed himself indeed, and thought, and word, will say to God, *Thy kingdom come*.”<sup>193</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “We again ask the Lord to save us from corruption and that death may be taken away or as it was said: ‘Your kingdom come,’ namely, that the Holy Spirit may dwell in us and purify us.”

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<sup>190</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 25.1, 3 (ACW 19:84–85, 87).

<sup>191</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 19 (ANF 5:452).

<sup>192</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 13 (ANF 5:450–451).

<sup>193</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 23.13 (NPNF II/7:155).

**Tertullian** says, “Our wish is that our reign be hastened, not our servitude protracted [in this world].”<sup>194</sup>

**937. Why do we say, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”? Will God not carry out His will unless we ask Him to do so?**

We ask of God that everything we think of, talk about, or practice may be according to His divine will and pleasure. The apostle says, “Now to Him who can do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Eph. 3:20).

**St. Cyprian** says, “But since we are hindered by the devil from obeying with our thought and deed God’s will in all things, we pray and ask that God’s will may be done in us and that it may be done in us we need God’s goodwill, that is, of His help and protection, since no one is strong in his strength, but he is safe by the grace and mercy of God.”<sup>195</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “What is this then, ‘Thy will be done’? May it be done in me, that I may not resist Thy will. Therefore here again it is for yourself that you pray, and not for God. For the will of God will be done in you, even if it be not done by you.<sup>196</sup> For both in them to whom He shall say, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, receive the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world’ (Matt. 25:34); shall the will of God be done, that the saints and righteous may receive the kingdom; and in them to whom He shall say, ‘Depart into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels’ (Matt. 25:41), shall the will of God be done, that the wicked may be condemned to everlasting fire. That His will may be done by you is another thing. It is not then without a cause, but that it may be well with you, that you pray that His will may be done in you. But whether it be well or ill with you, it will still be done in you: but O that it may be done by you also.”<sup>197</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “God’s divine and blessed Angels do the will of God, as David said in the Psalm, ‘Bless the Lord, all you Angels of His, mighty in strength, that do His pleasure’ (Ps. 103:20). So then in effect you mean this by your prayer, as in the Angels Your will is done, so likewise be it done on earth in me, O Lord.”<sup>198</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For there is nothing to hinder our reaching the perfection of the powers above, because we inhabit the earth; but it is possible even while abiding here, to

<sup>194</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 5 (ANF 3:683).

<sup>195</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 14 (ANF 5:451).

<sup>196</sup> Author’s note: St. Augustine distinguishes between the will of God “working in us” on the one hand, and “working by means of us” on the other. It is working in us whether we will or not; but its presence working by means of us he applies only where we ourselves choose to do His will.

<sup>197</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.7 (NPNF I/6:276).

<sup>198</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 23.14 (NPNF II/7:155) amended.

do all, as though already placed on high. What He says therefore is this: ‘vouchsafe that we men may not do Your will by halves, but perform all things as You will.’”<sup>199</sup>

**938. What do the words “heaven” and “earth” signify in this expression (Matt. 6:10)?**

Heaven and earth bear symbolic meanings, among which are the following:

**First: angels and humans.** **St. Augustine** says, “as the Angels serve You in heaven, so we may serve You in earth. For His holy Angels obey Him; they do not offend Him; they do His commands through the love of Him. This we pray for then, that we too may do the commands of God in love.”<sup>200</sup>

**Abba Isaac** says, “There can now be no grander prayer than to wish that earthly things may be made equal with things heavenly: for what else is it to say ‘Your will be done as in heaven so on earth,’ than to ask that men may be like angels and that as God's will is ever fulfilled by them in heaven, so also all those who are on earth may do not their own but His will?”<sup>201</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “As in heaven the angels obey You, and creation serves You, so even may man serve you.”<sup>202</sup>

**Origen** says, “Let us ask that on earth, that is to say, among those who are of the lower kind, as in heaven, the will of God may be accomplished, in order that the earth may, so to speak, be made into heaven, and thus one day there will be no more earth but everything will have become heaven ... if *the will of God is done on earth as it is done in heaven*, we shall all be heaven. *Flesh* which *profits nothing*, and *blood* which is akin to flesh, *cannot possess the kingdom of God* (cf. John 6:64; 1 Cor. 6:9f; 15:50). But if they be changed from flesh and earth and dust and blood to heavenly substance, it may perhaps be said that they will inherit it.”<sup>203</sup>

**Second: the spirit (or mind) and the flesh.** **St. Augustine** says, “But when the flesh shall be in harmony with the mind, and death shall be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor. 15:54), so that no carnal desires shall remain for the mind to be in conflict with, when strife in the earth shall have passed away, the war of the heart be over, and that be gone by which is spoken, ‘the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would’ (Gal. 5:17); when this war, I say, shall be over, and all concupiscence shall have been changed into charity, nothing shall remain in the body to oppose the spirit, nothing to be tamed, nothing to be bridled, nothing to be trodden down; but the whole shall go on through concord unto

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<sup>199</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.7 (NPNF I/10:132) amended.

<sup>200</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 9.5 (NPNF I/6:289).

<sup>201</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.20 (NPNF II/11:394) amended.

<sup>202</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1* 58 (FOTC 48:419–420).

<sup>203</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 26.6 (ACW 19:91–92).

righteousness, and the will of God will be done in heaven and in earth. We wish for perfection, when we pray for this.”<sup>204</sup>

“That as Your command is well-pleasing to our mind, so may our flesh consent thereto; and so that strife be ended which is described by the Apostle ... be then the contest now, that there may be victory hereafter.”<sup>205</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “For since we possess the body from the earth and the spirit from heaven, we ourselves are earth and heaven; and in both—that is, both in body and spirit—we pray that God’s will may be done. For between the flesh and spirit there is a struggle; and there is a daily strife as they disagree one with the other, so that we cannot do those very things that we would, in that the spirit seeks heavenly and divine things, while the flesh lusts after earthly and temporal things; and therefore we ask (Gal. 5:17–22) that, by the help and assistance of God, agreement may be made between these two natures, so that while the will of God is done both in the spirit and in the flesh, the soul which is new-born by Him may be preserved.”<sup>206</sup>

**Third: the spiritual man and the carnal man.** **St. Augustine** says, “In the Church the spiritual are heaven, the carnal are earth. So then, ‘Your will be done as in heaven so in earth’; that as the spiritual do serve You, so the carnal being reformed may serve You also.”<sup>207</sup>

“All the holy Patriarchs, all the Prophets, all the Apostles, all the spiritual are as it were God’s heaven; and we in comparison of them are earth. Your will be done, as in heaven, so in earth; as in them, so in us also.”<sup>208</sup>

**Origen** says, “if *the will of God is done on earth as it is done in heaven*, we shall all be heaven. *Flesh which profits nothing*, and *blood which is akin to flesh, cannot possess the kingdom of God* (cf. John 6:64; 1 Cor. 6:9f; 15:50). But if they be changed from flesh and earth and dust and blood to heavenly substance, it may perhaps be said that they will inherit it.”<sup>209</sup>

**Fourth: believers and nonbelievers.** **St. Augustine** says, “The Church of God is heaven, His enemies are earth. So we wish well for our enemies, that they too may believe and become Christians, and so the will of God be done, as in heaven, so also in earth. Again, “Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth.”<sup>210</sup>

<sup>204</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.8 (NPNF I/6:276) amended.

<sup>205</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.4 (NPNF I/6:285) amended.

<sup>206</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 16 (ANF 5:451).

<sup>207</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.8 (NPNF I/6:276).

<sup>208</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.6 (NPNF I/6:281).

<sup>209</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 26.6 (ACW 19:92).

<sup>210</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.6 (NPNF I/6:281).

**St. Cyprian** says, “we should ask, moreover, for those who are still earth, and have not yet begun to be heavenly, that even in respect of these God’s will should be done ... that as in heaven—that is, in us by our faith—the will of God has been done, so that we might be of heaven; so also in the earth—that is, in those who believe not—God’s will may be done, that they who as yet are by their first birth of earth, may being born of water and of the Spirit, begin to be of heaven.”<sup>211</sup>

**939. What does He mean by “bread” when He says, “Give us this day our daily (or essential, or tomorrow’s) bread” (Matt. 6:11)?**

In brief, the word “bread” refers to daily nourishment, or to the Eucharist, or to God’s word (the Holy Bible), or to the Lord Christ Himself.

**First: daily nourishment.** The believer ought to maintain the health of his body as well as that of his soul. **St. Augustine** says, “Give us eternal things, give us things temporal. You have promised a kingdom, deny us not the means of subsistence. You will give everlasting glory with Yourself hereafter, give us in this earth temporal support ... This petition for daily bread is doubtless to be understood in two ways, both for the necessary supply of our bodily food and for the necessities of our spiritual support. There is a necessary supply of bodily food, for the preservation of our daily life, without which we cannot live. This is food and clothing, but the whole is understood in a part. When we ask for bread, we thereby understand all things.”<sup>212</sup>

**Second: the sacrament of the Eucharist.** **St. Augustine** says in a sermon to catechumens, “Again, this is a very good sense of, ‘Give us this day our daily bread,’ your Eucharist, our daily food. For the faithful know what they receive, and good for them it is to receive that daily bread which is necessary for this time present ... Therefore, Give us this day our daily bread. What is this? Let us live so, that we be not separated from Your altar.”<sup>213</sup>

**Third: the word of God.** **St. Augustine** says, “Because then both good and bad receive this bread from God, do you think there is no other bread for which the children ask, of which the Lord said in the Gospel, ‘It is not meet to take the children’s bread, and to cast it to dogs?’ (Matt. 15:26). Yes, surely there is. What then is that bread? And why is it called daily? Because this is as necessary as the other; for without it we cannot live; without bread we cannot live. It is shamelessness to ask for wealth from God; it is no shamelessness to ask for daily bread. That which ministers to pride is one thing, that which ministers to life another. Nevertheless, because this bread which may be seen and handled, is given both to the good and bad; there is a daily bread, for which the children pray. That is the word of God, which is dealt out to us day by day. Our bread is daily bread; and by it live not our bodies, but our souls. It is necessary for us who are even now laborers in the vineyard,—it is our food,

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<sup>211</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 17 (ANF 5:452).

<sup>212</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.7 (NPNF I/6:282) amended.

<sup>213</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.5 (NPNF I/6:285).

not our hire. For he that hires the laborer into the vineyard owes him two things; food, that he faints not, and his hire, wherewith he may rejoice. Our daily food then in this earth is the word of God, which is dealt out always in the Churches: our hire after labor is called eternal life.”<sup>214</sup>

“Again, what I am handling before you now is ‘daily bread’; and the daily lessons which you hear in church, are daily bread, and the hymns you hear and repeat are daily bread. For all these are necessary in our state of pilgrimage.”<sup>215</sup>

“But when this life shall have passed away, we shall neither seek that bread which hunger seeks; nor shall we have to receive the Sacrament of the Altar, because we shall be there with Christ, whose Body we do now receive; nor will those words which we are now speaking, need to be said to you, nor the sacred volume to be read, when we shall see Him who is Himself the Word of God, by whom all things were made, by whom the Angels are fed, by whom the Angels are enlightened, by whom the Angels become wise; not requiring words of circuitous discourse; but drinking in the Only Word, filled with whom they burst forth and never fail in praise. For, ‘Blessed,’ says the Psalm, ‘are they who dwell in Your house; they will be always praising You. (Ps. 84:4).’<sup>216</sup>

**Fourth: Christ Himself. St. Cyprian** says, “For Christ is the bread of life; and this bread does not belong to all men, but it is ours. And according as we say, ‘Our Father,’ because He is the Father of those who understand and believe; so also we call it ‘our bread,’ because Christ is the bread of those who are in union with His body. And we ask that this bread should be given to us daily, that we who are in Christ, and daily receive the Eucharist for the food of salvation, may not, by the interposition of some heinous sin, by being prevented, as withheld and not communicating, from partaking of the heavenly bread, be separated from Christ’s body, as He Himself predicts, and warns, ‘I am the bread of life which came down from heaven. If any man eat of my bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world’ (John 6:51). ... And therefore we ask that our bread—that is, Christ—may be given to us daily, that we who abide and live in Christ may not depart from His sanctification and body.”<sup>217</sup>

The scholar **Tertullian** says, “For Christ is our Bread; because Christ is Life, and bread is life. ‘I am, says He, the Bread of Life’; (John. 6:35) and, a little above, ‘For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world’ (John. 6:33). Then we *find*, too, that His body is reckoned in bread.”<sup>218</sup>

<sup>214</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.10 (NPNF I/6:277).

<sup>215</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.7 (NPNF I/6:282) amended.

<sup>216</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 9.6 (NPNF I/6:289) amended.

<sup>217</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 18 (ANF 5:452).

<sup>218</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 6 (ANF 3:683).

**St. Augustine** believes that this daily bread is to live out the Lord Christ’s resurrection; that is, to experience every day the power of His resurrection working within us.

The scholar **Origen** says, “The ‘true bread’ is that which nourishes the true man, the *man created after the image of God* (cf. Gen. 1:26f; Col. 3:9f), and through which he who is nourished by it is made *to the image of Him that created him*. What is more nourishing for the soul than the Word (cf. John 1:1, 14; 14:6; 17:17; Luke 11:49; 1 Cor. 1:24, 30)? And what is more precious for the mind of him that understands it than the wisdom of God? And what is in better accord with rational nature than truth?”<sup>219</sup>

He also says, “In order, then, that our soul may not become ill through want of nourishment and that we may not die to God through hunger for the Word of the Lord (cf. Amos 8:11; Rom. 14:8), let us, while leading in obedience to the reaching of Our Saviour a better life and with greater faith, ask the Father for the living bread which is the same as the supersubstantial bread.”<sup>220</sup>

The word “daily” has been understood in two ways. In his commentary on the Lord’s Prayer, Origen explains that the word we usually translated as “daily,” *epiouios*, is derived from *ousia*, which means “essence” or “essential”,<sup>221</sup> while others believe that it is derived from *epienai*,<sup>222</sup> which means “of the coming day.” Similarly, James Strong, in his “Greek Dictionary of the New Testament,” explains that the word is derived either from *epiousa*, *epi*, or *eimi*, meaning “for subsistence,” “needful,” “daily,” or “tomorrow’s.”<sup>223</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “The Hebrew Gospel according to Matthew reads: ‘Give us this day tomorrow’s bread,’ in other words, the Bread that You will give us in Your kingdom, give us this day.”<sup>224</sup>

#### **940. Why does God not forgive us our trespasses unless we also forgive our brethren their trespasses?**

In practice, we witness our own wickedness in that we do not generally pardon others for the things they do against us; and in that we are strangers to the goodness of God. We ought to approach prayer in a spirit of love, without any malice or hatred towards anyone, regardless of his stance against us or against the Church. Our forgiveness towards him in our hearts is manifest to God Himself. Thus do we fulfil the apostolic command: “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men” (Rom.12:18).

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<sup>219</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 27.2 (ACW 19:93).

<sup>220</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 27.6 (ACW 19:96).

<sup>221</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 27.8 (ACW 19:97–98).

<sup>222</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 27.13 (ACW 19:102).

<sup>223</sup> *Strong’s Concordance*, Greek entries 1967, 1966, 1909, 1910

<sup>224</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 47 (FOTC 48:355–356).



**Abba Isaac** says, “Whoever then does not from his heart forgive his brother who has offended him, by this prayer calls down upon himself not forgiveness but condemnation.”<sup>225</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “‘forgive us our debts’ ... For debtors are we, not in money, but sins. You are saying perchance at this moment, and you too. We answer, Yes, we too. What, you Holy Bishops, are you debtors? Yes, we are debtors too. What you! My Lord. Be it far from you, do not yourself this wrong. I do myself no wrong, but I say the truth; we are debtors: ‘If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us’ (1 John 1:8). We have been baptized, and yet are we debtors. Not that anything then remained, which was not remitted to us in Baptism, but because in our lives we are contracting ever what needs daily forgiveness.”<sup>226</sup>

“What man is there that lives so, that this prayer is not necessary for him? He may puff himself up, justify himself he cannot. It were well for him to imitate the Publican, and not swell as the Pharisee, ‘who went up into the temple’ (Luke 18:10–11), and boasted of his deserts, and covered up his wounds. Whereas he who said, ‘Lord, be merciful to me a sinner’ (Luke 18:13), knew wherefore he went up. Consider, my brethren, this prayer the Lord Jesus taught His disciples to offer, those great first Apostles of His, the leaders of our flock. If the leaders of the flock then pray for the remission of their sins, what ought the lambs to do?”<sup>227</sup>

“Alms and prayers purge away sins; only let not such sins be committed, for which we must necessarily be separated from our daily Bread [the Eucharist]; we avoid all such debts to which a severe and certain condemnation is due.”<sup>228</sup>

“It is an engagement, a covenant, an agreement that we make with God. The Lord your God says to you, ‘Forgive, and I will forgive.’ You have not forgiven; you retain your sins against yourself, not I.”<sup>229</sup>

“... wholly and from your hearts forgive whatsoever you have against any. Forgive it there where God sees. For sometimes a man remits with the mouth, and in the heart retains; he remits with the mouth for men’s sake, and retains in the heart, as not fearing the eyes of God.”<sup>230</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “After the supply of food, pardon of sin is also asked for, that he who is fed by God may live in God, and that not only the present and temporal life may be provided for, but the eternal also, to which we may come if our sins are forgiven; and these

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<sup>225</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.22 (NPNF II/11:395).

<sup>226</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.11 (NPNF I/6:277) amended.

<sup>227</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.6 (NPNF I/6:286).

<sup>228</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.12 (NPNF I/6:277) amended.

<sup>229</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.13 (NPNF I/6:278) amended.

<sup>230</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.7 (NPNF I/6:286) amended.

the Lord calls debts, as He says in His Gospel, ‘I forgave you all that debt because you begged me’ (Matt. 18:32). And how necessarily, how providently and beneficial, are we admonished that we are sinners, since we are compelled to entreat for our sins, and while pardon is asked for from God, the soul recalls its consciousness of sin! Lest anyone should flatter himself that he is innocent, and by exalting himself should more deeply perish, he is instructed and taught that he sins daily, in that he is bidden to entreat daily for his sins. Thus, moreover, John also in his epistle warns us, and says, ‘If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us; but if we confess our sins, the Lord is faithful and just to forgive us our sins’ (1 John. 1:8).”<sup>231</sup>

#### **941. What does “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” mean?**

**Abba Isaac** says, “Job was tempted but was not led into temptation. For he did not ascribe folly to God nor blasphemy, nor with impious mouth did he yield to that wish of the tempter toward which he was drawn. Abraham was tempted, Joseph was tempted, but neither of them was led into temptation for neither of them yielded his consent to the tempter.”<sup>232</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “For whosoever is overcome by temptation, commits sin. Thus the Apostle James says, ‘Let no man say when he is tempted, he is tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither does He tempt any man. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then lust, when it has conceived, brings forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, brings forth death’ (James 1:13–15). Therefore that you not be drawn away by your lust; do not consent to it.”<sup>233</sup>

“With that kind of temptation, whereby we are deceived and seduced, God tempts no man. But undoubtedly in His deep and hidden judgment He abandons some. And when He has abandoned them, the tempter finds his opportunity. For he finds in him no resistance against his power, but immediately presents himself to him as his possessor, if God abandon him. Therefore that He may not abandon us, do we say, ‘Lead us not into temptation’ ... What then has he [the apostle James] hereby taught us? To fight against our lusts ... Let no enemy from without be feared: conquer your own self, and the whole world is conquered. What can any tempter from without, whether the devil or the devil’s minister, do against you? Whosoever sets the hope of gain before you to seduce you, let him only find no covetousness in you; and what can he who would tempt you by gain effect? Whereas if covetousness be found in you, you take fire at the sight of gain, and are taken by the bait of this corrupt food ... Or should the tempter set before you some woman of surpassing beauty; if chastity be within, iniquity from without is overcome. Therefore that he may not take you with the bait of a strange woman’s beauty, fight with your own lust within; you have

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<sup>231</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 22 (ANF 5:453).

<sup>232</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.23 (NPNF II/11:395).

<sup>233</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 8.9 (NPNF I/6:287) amended.

no sensible perception of your enemy, but of your own concupiscence you have ... Get the mastery then over that of which you are sensible within.”<sup>234</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “In which words it is shown that the adversary can do nothing against us except God shall have previously permitted it; so that all our fear, and devotion, and obedience may be turned towards God since in our temptations nothing is permitted to evil unless power is given from Him. This is proved by divine Scripture, which says, ‘Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it, and the Lord delivered it into his hand’ (2 Kings 24:11). But power is given to evil against us according to our sins, as it is written, ‘Who gave Jacob for a spoil, and Israel to those who make a prey of Him? Did not the Lord, against whom they sinned, and would not walk in His ways, nor hear His law? And He has brought upon them the anger of His wrath’ (Isa. 13:24). And again, when Solomon sinned, and departed from the Lord’s commandments and ways, it is recorded, ‘Now the Lord raised up an adversary against Solomon’ (1 Kings 11:14). Now power is given against us in two modes: either for punishment when we sin, or for glory when we are proved, as we see was done concerning Job; as God Himself sets forth, saying, ‘Behold, all that he has I give unto your hands; but be careful not to touch himself’ (Job 1:12). And the Lord in His Gospel says, in the time of His passion, ‘You could have no power against me unless it were given you from above’ (John 19:11). But when we ask that we may not come into temptation, we are reminded of our infirmity and weakness in that we thus ask, lest any should insolently vaunt himself, lest any should proudly and arrogantly assume anything to himself, lest any should take to himself the glory either of confession or of suffering as his own, when the Lord Himself, teaching humility, said, ‘Watch and pray, that you enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak’ (Mark. 14:38).”<sup>235</sup>

He also says, “And when we say, ‘Deliver us from evil,’ there remains nothing further which ought to be asked. When we have once asked for God’s protection against evil, and have obtained it, then against everything which the devil and the world work against us we stand secure and safe. For what fear is there in this life, to the man whose guardian in this life is God?”<sup>236</sup>

#### **942. Why do we conclude the Lord’s Prayer by glorifying God with the words, “For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever”?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “manifold as your weakness may be, you may of right be confident, having such a One to reign over you, Who is able fully to accomplish all, and that

<sup>234</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.9 (NPNF I/6:283–284) amended.

<sup>235</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 25–26 (ANF 5:454).

<sup>236</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 27 (ANF 5:455).

with ease, even by you ... He not only frees you from the dangers that are approaching you, but can make you also glorious and illustrious.”<sup>237</sup>

“This He [God] desires you duly to perform, rather than the shutting of the doors, even to shut the doors of the mind.”<sup>238</sup>

“For because He Himself is invisible, He would have your prayer be so likewise.”<sup>239</sup>

**943. Why does He emphasize: “For if you forgive people their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, and if you do not forgive people their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15)?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Since not by grace only, you see, ought we to become His children, but also by our works. And nothing makes us so like God, as being ready to forgive the wicked and wrong-doers; even as indeed He had taught before when He spoke of His ‘making the sun to shine on the evil and the good’ (Matt. 5:45).”<sup>240</sup>

“For as when a man gazes upon the beauty of the heavens, he says, *Glory be to you, O God*; so likewise when He beholds a man’s virtuous actions, seeing that the virtue of man glorifies God much more than the heavens.”<sup>241</sup>

“As if He says, ‘Enable us, O Lord, to follow the heavenly life, that whatever You will, we may will in also.’”<sup>242</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “Nor are we indeed carelessly to pass by the circumstance, that of all those sentences in which the Lord has taught us to pray, He has judged that that one is chiefly to be commended which has reference to the forgiveness of sins: in which He would have us to be merciful, because it is the only wisdom for escaping misery. For in no other sentence do we pray in such a way that we, as it were, enter into a compact with God: for we say, ‘Forgive us, as we also forgive.’”<sup>243</sup>

**St. Cyprian** says, “He has clearly joined herewith and added the law, and has bound us by a certain condition and engagement, that we should ask that our debts be forgiven us in such a manner as we ourselves forgive our debtors, knowing that that which we seek for our sins cannot be obtained unless we ourselves have acted in a similar way in respect of our debtors. Therefore also He says in another place, ‘With what measure you use, it shall be measured to you again’ (Matt. 7:2). And the servant who, after having had all his debt

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<sup>237</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.10 (NPNF I/10:134) amended.

<sup>238</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.3 (NPNF I/10:129).

<sup>239</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 19.4 (NPNF I/10:130).

<sup>240</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* Homily 19.11 (NPNF I/10:134).

<sup>241</sup> St. John Chrysostom, quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Volume 3, Part 2* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843) On Luke 11:1–5: p. 387, amended.

<sup>242</sup> St. John Chrysostom, quoted in Thomas Aquinas, *Catena Aurea: Volume 3, Part 2* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843) On Luke 11:1–5: p. 388, amended.

<sup>243</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 2.11.39 (NPNF I/6:46).

forgiven him by his master, would not forgive his fellow-servant, is cast back into prison; because he would not forgive his fellow-servant, he lost the indulgence that had been shown to himself by his lord ... There remains no ground of excuse in the day of judgment, when you will be judged according to your own sentence; and whatever you have done, that you also will suffer.”<sup>244</sup>

**944. Why are the supplications in the Lord’s Prayer ordered this way?**

**St. Augustine** sees a clear distinction between those supplications that concern the future eternal life for which we hope and those whose fulfilment begins from now but continue in eternity — namely, “Hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven” — and those supplications that only concern our present life — “Give us this day our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses, lead us not into temptation, deliver us from the evil one.”<sup>245</sup> In eternity, we will not need daily bread and will not ask for forgiveness since we will sin no more. There will be no tempter to fight against us, and thus we will not pray for deliverance from the evil one.

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<sup>244</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 23 (ANF 5:453–454) amended.

<sup>245</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 2.10.36–37 (NPNF I/6:45–46).

## 5

### Prayer of the Mind and Contemplation<sup>246</sup>

#### 945. Why did St. Aphrahat<sup>247</sup> the Persian sage focus on the internal prayer of the mind?

It is called the prayer of the mind, prayer of the heart, silent prayer, or hidden prayer, or sometimes, contemplative prayer. The fourth demonstration of **St. Aphrahat** stands out as one of the oldest extant Christian texts on prayer. It's discussion of the Lord's Prayer differs from other well-known writings on the subject of prayer from this period, such as those by Tertullian, Origen, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Cyprian, St. Augustine, and others. It is characterized by its wealth of examples from scripture that emphasize that purity of heart is essential as a prerequisite for a prayer to be accepted. St. Aphrahat considers prayer to be the inner encounter of the pure heart with the holy God; prayer is the dialogue of the heart which cannot be pleasing to the holy God unless it is pure and clean.

**St. Aphrahat** introduces this Demonstration thus: "Purity of heart is a prayer, more so than all the prayers which are prayed in a loud voice, and silence being joined together with a luminous mind is better than the loud voice when a person cries out. My beloved, now give me your heart (Prov. 23:26) and your mind, and hear about the power of pure prayer and see how our righteous forefathers were triumphant before God through their prayer and how it became a pure offering (Mal. 1:11) for them."<sup>248</sup>

#### 946. What is the power of the prayer of the mind?

**First:** Prayer, according to **St. Clement of Alexandria**, is an essential element in the life of the "gnostic" (the lover of true knowledge); who, even if he regularly prays the canonical hours, ought to be aware that his prayer is limited by time, nor is it limited to a certain place. His entire life is prayer.<sup>249</sup> It is powerful and effective even though it is silent. It revolves around constant thanksgiving to God and intercession for others, in the likeness of the Savior.

**Second:** God shows His acceptance of the prayer of the mind by sending an angel in the form of fire that consumes the sacrifice that is offered through the prayer of the mind by the pure hearts of the righteous people of God. This same fire, however, does not come near any offerings of the wicked.

Here is a sample of excerpts from St. Aphrahat's Demonstrations:

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<sup>246</sup> See also Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Patrology: St. Aphrahat the Persian Sage*, 2003 (Arabic).

<sup>247</sup> Translators' Note: the name in English is spelt Aphraphat or Aphrahat by different authors and translators.

<sup>248</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.1: p. 76.

<sup>249</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.7 (ANF 2:533–534).

- a. The offerings of Cain and Abel: “First of all, the offering of Abel was accepted indeed before God through his purity of heart, and that of Cain was rejected (Gen. 4:3–5). And how was the matter known to us that the offering of Abel was accepted and that of Cain was rejected? ... For when Abel and Cain offered their offerings together, living fire that was ministering before God (Ps. 104:4) came down and licked up the pure offering of Abel, and (since) that of Cain was impure it did not touch it. From there Abel understood that his offering was accepted, on the other hand Cain also realized that his was rejected. The fruits of Cain’s heart demonstrated and witnessed about him that he was full of treachery when he killed his brother (Gen. 4:8). For to what his mind conceived, his hands gave birth. And the purity of the heart of Abel is his prayer.”<sup>250</sup>
- b. Abraham: “Also Abraham, when God asserted to him the promise that a son would be born to him, saying to him, ‘Take for yourself a three year old calf, a three year old goat, a pigeon and a young dove’ (Gen. 15:9), and when Abraham sacrificed them and cut (them) into pieces, placing a member against its companion, there fell upon him a deep sleep: darkness came and fire descended, and passed between the divisions and it devoured the offerings of Abraham (Gen. 15:17) ... But hear my beloved about this pure prayer that how many powers were revealed by means of it. For when Abraham prayed, he brought back the booty, which the five kings (had captured) (Gen. 14:16). Again, through his prayer a barren woman gave birth (Gen. 21:2). Similarly, through the power of his prayer he received the promise that in his seed the nations would be blessed (Gen. 22:18). Isaac also demonstrated the power of prayer when he prayed over Rebecca and she gave birth (Gen. 25:21); and for Abimelech, and the anger (of God) was withheld from him.”<sup>251</sup>
- c. Manoah, father of Samson: “For when Manoah, the father of Samson offered up an offering, the living fire descended and licked it up (Judg. 13:20), in the same flame the angel who spoke with him ascended to heaven.”<sup>252</sup>
- d. Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron: “Also with Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, when they despised the administering of the offering, fire descended as usual at the time of the offering, but it found their offerings not pure, and it did not touch them. When they saw that their offering was not consumed, they brought strange fire to consume it, so that they would not be censured by Moses, (asking) for what cause was the offering not consumed? The strange fire consumed the offering but this (fire)

<sup>250</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.2: pp. 77–78.

<sup>251</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.3–4: pp. 78–79.

<sup>252</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.3: p. 78.

from heaven devoured them (Lev. 10:2; Num. 3:4, 26:61). The Lord sanctified himself over them, over those who despised his ministry.”<sup>253</sup>

- e. The two hundred fifty who rebelled against Moses: “Also when two hundred and fifty men were divided against Moses and offered incense without authority, fire was commanded to come in from before Lord and it devoured them (Num. 16:35).”<sup>254</sup>
- f. Moses’ prayers from a pure heart: “What we should say then about the limitless power of the prayer of Moses? His prayer rescued him from the hands of Pharaoh, and it showed him the shekinah of his God (Ex. 3:2). Through his prayer he brought the ten plagues on Pharaoh (Ex. 7:8–12). It was again his prayer (that) divided the sea (Ex. 14:21) and made the bitter water sweet (Ex. 15:23–25), it caused manna to come down and the quails to come out (Ex. 16:1–35), it broke the rock and supplied water abundantly (Ex. 17:1–7), it conquered Amalek and strengthened Joshua (Ex. 17:8–13), it routed Og and Sihon in the war (Num. 21:21–35), it brought the wicked ones down to Sheol (Num. 16:33), it changed the anger of his God from his people and shattered the calf of sin (Ex. 32:20), it brought down the tablets from the mountain and made his (Moses’) face shine (Ex. 34:29).”<sup>255</sup>
- g. Jonah and his pure heart: “Again Jonah prayed before his God from the depths of the sea (Jonah 2:2-4), it was heard and was answered, and he was saved without any harm. For, his prayer pierced the depths, overcame the waves, overpowered the storms, pierced the cloud (Sir. 35:17), flew through the air and opened the heaven, and came near before the throne of the Most High by means of Gabriel who brings prayers before God. The depths threw up the prophetic man, and the fish brought forth Jonah to the dry land.”<sup>256</sup>
- h. Hezekiah: “Hezekiah also prayed, and his prayer cast down one hundred and eighty-five thousand men through an angel, the leader of the army (2 Kings 19:14–19).”<sup>257</sup>
- i. The prayer of the three pure-hearted youths: “Let us then understand from the three righteous men, Hananiah, Azariah and Misael (Dan. 3:21) who were cast into the fire, but were not burned, the fire had no power over them because they had built a firm

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<sup>253</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.3: p. 78.

<sup>254</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.3: p. 79.

<sup>255</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.7: p. 82.

<sup>256</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.8: p. 83.

<sup>257</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.8: p. 83.



building and rejected the commandment of Nebuchadnezzar, the king; they did not worship the image which he made.”<sup>258</sup>

- j. The prayer of the pure-hearted Daniel: “Daniel also prayed, and his prayer shut the mouth of the lions (Dan. 6:17–24). The devouring mouth was shut before the flesh and bones of the just man. Lions extended their hands and received Daniel so that he would not fall down on the earth. They embraced him in their arms, and they kissed his feet. When Daniel stood up in the pit to pray, they also spread out their hands to heaven like Daniel. He who receives the prayers descended to them and shut up the mouth of the lions. For Daniel said to Darius, ‘My God has sent his angel and has shut the mouth of the lions and they have not hurt me’ (Dan. 6:22). For the pit was closed and sealed, and light shone forth inside it. Lions were then happy, that they saw the light because of Daniel. For when Daniel wished to sleep, the lions laid themselves down flat so that he might sleep on them and not on the ground. For that pit was illumined more than an upper room with its many windows (Dan. 6:10). There his prayers were many more than in his upper room where he prayed only three times (in a day) (Dan. 6:11). When Daniel came up victorious, his slanderers fell (into the pit) instead of him and the mouths of the lions were opened and they devoured them, reducing to powder their bones. Again his prayer caused the captivity to return from Babylon after the completion of seventy years (Dan. 9:23–27).”<sup>259</sup>

**Third:** Pure prayer and the open heavens: “Our father Jacob also prayed at Bethel and saw the gate of heaven opened, and a ladder leading up to the height (Gen. 28:12). This is a symbol of our Savior which Jacob saw (Gen. 28:12–15). The gate of heaven is Christ, as he said, ‘I am the gate of life, everyone who enters through me shall live forever’ (John. 10:9). David also said, ‘This is the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter’ (Ps. 118:20). Again, the ladder which Jacob saw, is a symbol of our Savior that through him the righteous people ascend from below to above. Again, it is a symbol of the cross of our Savior which was raised in the form of a ladder, our Lord standing above from it. For above Christ is the Lord of all, as the blessed Apostle said: ‘The head of Christ is God’ (1 Cor. 11:3). Jacob called that place Bethel (Gen. 28:19), and Jacob erected there a pillar of stone for a testimony, and he poured oil in its top. Our father Jacob too did this before in symbol, that the stones would receive anointing. For the people who believed in the anointed (Messiah) will be anointed as John said about them, ‘God can raise up children for Abraham from these stones’ (Luke. 3:8). For the mystery of the calling of the Nations is manifested before through the prayer of Jacob.”<sup>260</sup>

<sup>258</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 1.12: p. 33.

<sup>259</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.9: p. 84.

<sup>260</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.5: p. 80.

**Fourth:** The silent prayer of a pure heart: “We may come to the prayer of silence which Hannah, the mother of Samuel, prayed (1 Sam. 1:13). It was acceptable before God, it opened up her barren womb and caused her shame to depart, and she gave birth to a Nazirite and a priest (1 Sam. 1:10–16).”<sup>261</sup>

#### **947. What is the hidden (or secret) prayer to which the Lord Christ invites us?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Prayer is, then, to speak more boldly, converse with God. Though whispering, consequently, and not opening the lips, we speak in silence, yet we cry inwardly. For God hears continually all the inward converse.”<sup>262</sup>

**St. Aphrahat** says, “Again our Savior taught the prayer and said, ‘You should pray secretly to the Hidden One; He sees everything’ (Matt. 6:6). For he said, ‘Enter the inner chamber and pray secretly to your Father, and the Father who sees in secret will reward you’ (Matt. 6:6). But why, my beloved, did our Savior teach and say, ‘Pray to your Father in secret with the door closed?’ I will explain this to you as much as I have understood. For he said, ‘Pray to your Father in secret with the door closed.’ What is the door that he said to close? If not your mouth, which is (the door to) the temple in which Christ dwells as the Apostle said, ‘You are the temple of the Lord’ (1 Cor. 3:16), for him to enter into your inner man, to this house, cleanse it from everything that is unclean, while the door, that is your mouth, is to be closed. If that was not so, how would you understand this matter? For if it happens to you that you were in a land, and there is no house and door, would you not pray in secret? Or if it happens to you again that you were on the top of a mountain, would you not pray?

“And our Savior showed this that God knows the will of the heart and of the thought, just as our Lord said, ‘Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him’ (Matt. 6:8). It is written in the prophet Isaiah, ‘Before they who were chosen by me call, I will hear them, and before they make the cry I will answer them’ (Isa. 65:24). Isaiah said again about the wicked, ‘Even though you multiply prayer I will not listen’ (Isa. 1:15). He said again, ‘They may cry in my ears with a loud voice, but I shall not hear them’ (Ezek. 8:18). But he said this about deceitful prayer, which is not accepted. For you must hear with excellence all the words, then you will understand their power.”<sup>263</sup>

Also, **Anthimus of Jerusalem** says, “Prayer is the hidden conversation of the heart with God, or a form of connection with Him. Even if it were silent, many times God hears the cries of our hearts which we cannot express in words. There is no weapon that is more powerful than prayer. If it is offered from a pure heart, the Lord will hear it. And if it is accompanied with good deeds, He will respond and listen to it.”

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<sup>261</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.8: p. 82.

<sup>262</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.7 (ANF 2:534).

<sup>263</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.10: pp. 85–86.

**948. Is it sufficient to pray internally with our hearts or minds without uttering words from our mouths, raising hands, or bowing down before God?**

While inner prayer is important, the God who created our bodies and souls wills also that we be sanctified in our bodily members as we are in our souls.

**949. What are the signs of purity of heart?**

**First:** Forgiving those who trespass against us. **St. Aphrahat says,** “There are people among us who multiply the prayers, make long intercessions, bowing themselves down and spreading out their hands (Isa. 1:15), but the works of prayer are far away from them. For they pray the prayer which our Life-giver taught, ‘Forgive us our debts, as we also forgive to our debtors’ (Matt. 6:12). O you who pray, should remember that you are bringing an offering before God. Let not the angel who presents prayers feel shame at an offering which has a blemish. That is to say, you pray that you be forgiven and acknowledge that you forgive; consider first in your mind whether you really forgive and then acknowledge ‘I do forgive.’ For you should not deceitfully act with God and say ‘I forgive’ when you do not forgive. For God is no man like you, whom you can deceive (Num. 23:19). ‘When a man sins against a man, he may beseech the Lord, but when a man acts foolishly against God, whom will he beseech?’ (1 Sam. 2:25). So do not find yourself guilty through your prayer.

“Hear again what our Lord said, ‘When you bring an offering and you remember that you have some grudge against your brother, leave your offering before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother and then come and bring your offering’ (Matt. 5:23–24). Lest when you pray, you remember that you have some grudge (against your brother), thereby you should consider in your mind that your prayer has been left before the altar. He who carries the prayers (Gabriel) will not wish to take it from the earth because he has inspected and seen a blemish in your offering. If it is pure, he takes it up before God. If he finds in your prayer, ‘forgive me and I do forgive,’ in such case it is said to the one who prays by (him who) takes up the prayers, ‘First of all forgive your debtor, and then I will raise up your (prayer) to the Lord, your creditor. You forgive the hundred denarii according to your poor condition and the Lord, your Creditor, will forgive you the ten thousand talents according to his greatness (Matt. 18:23–35). He will not reckon with you for any payment or interest.’

“If you are willing and forgiving then, he (Gabriel) takes your offering, the prayer, raises and brings it up with him. If you do not forgive, in such a case he will say to you, ‘I will not bring an unclean offering before the holy throne. But, see, you go there to give an account to your Creditor, taking your offering with you’; and he leaves your offering and goes off. Now listen to what the prophet had said, ‘Cursed is he who has a good ram in his flock, but he vows and sacrifices a sick one to the Lord’ (Mal. 1:14). For he said, ‘Offer it to your governor, and (see) whether he is pleased with you or will he give you favor?’ (Mal. 1:8). Therefore

you ought to forgive your debtor before your prayer and then pray. And when you pray, your prayer will ascend before God on high, and it is not left on the earth.”<sup>264</sup>

**Second:** Comforting the weary, for the comfort of God resides in comforting the weary. **St. Aphrahat** says, “For God said through the prophet, ‘This is my rest, give rest to the weary’ (Isa. 28:12). Therefore give the rest of God, o man. There is no need to you to say ‘forgive me.’ Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, provide for the poor (Matt. 25:35–36); this is prayer. I shall convince you, my beloved, about this, that (if) all the time a man does the rest of God, this is prayer. For it is written thus, ‘When Zimri committed fornication with a Midianite woman, Phineas, the son of Eleazar saw him and he entered into the cell and killed both of them’ (Num. 25:6–8; Sir. 45:23–26). Their killing was considered as prayer to him; David says about him thus, ‘Phineas has stood up and prayed, and it was considered a victory to him for generations, forever’ (Ps. 106:30–31). He killed them (lit. their killing which he killed) for the sake of his God and it was considered as prayer for him.

“Take heed, my beloved, suppose an opportunity of giving rest to the will of God happens to you, you say, ‘the time for prayer is near, I will pray and then take care.’ While you are seeking to complete your prayer the opportunity for giving rest has slipped away from you and you are disabled from (doing) the will and rest of God, and through your prayer you are guilty of sin. Rather, do the rest of God and it is prayer.”<sup>265</sup>

Phineas the priest could not bear to see Zimri with the Midianite woman with whom he had committed adultery and perhaps even worshipped her gods. He even dared to bring her in front of Moses and the whole assembly in front of the tabernacle, despising the holiness of the house of God.

**Third:** A sincere longing for prayer. **St. Aphrahat** says, “But all the more you be diligent for prayer and not to be reluctant (in it), as it is written that our Lord said, ‘Be praying and it shall not weary you’ (Luke 18:1). You should be diligent in wakefulness, remove from yourself drowsiness and slumber; you should be vigilant both by day and night, and you should not be disheartened.”<sup>266</sup>

**Fourth:** Purity of the heart. The scholar **Tertullian** says, “Purity does not signify the washing with water, but repentance through the work of the Holy Spirit within us for the purity of our hearts and our entire inner and outer beings.”

“But what reason is there in going to prayer with hands indeed washed, but the spirit foul?— inasmuch as to our hands themselves spiritual purities are necessary, that they may be lifted up pure from falsehood, from murder, from cruelty, from poisonings, from idolatry,

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<sup>264</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.14: pp. 88–90.

<sup>265</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.14: p. 90.

<sup>266</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.16: p. 92.

and all the other blemishes which, conceived by the spirit, are effected by the operation of the hands. These are the true purities.”<sup>267</sup>

“After the whole body has been washed and purified in baptism, there is need for purification through continuous repentance from the defilement of our hands.”<sup>268</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “And it would be proper, when one lifts up his eyes and lifts them up properly to heaven, also to lift up holy hands, especially when he offers up prayer without anger and contention (cf. 1 Tim. 2:8). For in this way, when the eyes are lifted up through thought and contemplation, and the hands are lifted up in deeds which lift up and exalt the soul, as Moses lifted up his hands (Ex. 17:11), one may consequently say, ‘The lifting up of my hands is as the evening sacrifice’ (Ps. 140:2); the Amalikes and all the unseen enemies will be worsted, and the Israelite reasonings in us will prevail.”<sup>269</sup>

**Fifth:** Acquiring a mindset of truth. The scholar **Origen** says, “And so it was more the soul of Anna that was cured of barrenness and bore fruit than her body when she conceived Samuel (cf. 1 Sam. 1:19f). Hezekiah begot divine children of the mind rather than such as are born of the body from the seed of the body (cf. 2 Kings 20:18; Isa. 39:7). Esther and Mordecai and the people were delivered even more from spiritual attacks than from Haman and the conspirators (cf. Esther 6–7).”<sup>270</sup>

### **950. Why does St. Basil the Great insist on the prayer of the mind, especially for monastics?**

**St. Basil** wants the monk to attain to the vision of God and union with Him. Then the monk’s life — despite the intrusions of work and toil — is overshadowed by the Holy Spirit, hovering over him every minute and every hour. Then prayer becomes the air he breathes and the food that nourishes him. **Theophan the Recluse** says, “I remember that St. Basil the Great solved the question how the Apostles could pray without ceasing, in this way: in everything they did, he replied, they thought of God and lived in constant devotion to Him. This spiritual state was their unceasing prayer.”<sup>271</sup>

### **951. What is prayer of the mind?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “It is necessary, in fact, to achieve complete tranquility from outside confusions, and bringing about an entire silence in the hidden recesses of the heart, thus to devote oneself to the contemplation of the truth. Do you hear what he says when he confesses his sin? ‘My eye is troubled through indignation’ (Ps. 6:7). Yet, not only

<sup>267</sup> Tertullian, *On Prayer* 13 (ANF 3:685).

<sup>268</sup> Cf. Tertullian, *On Prayer* 13 (ANF 3:685).

<sup>269</sup> Origen, *Commentary on the Gospel of John (Books 13–32)* 28.36–37 (FOTC 89:299).

<sup>270</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 16:3 (ACW 19:61–62).

<sup>271</sup> Chariton of Valamo (Igumen), *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, trans., E. Kadloubovsky and E. M. Palmer, ed., Timothy Ware (Faber & Faber, 1966): p. 83.

indignation, but also concupiscence and cowardice and envy trouble the eye of the soul; and, on the whole, all the passions are confounding and disturbing to the clear-sightedness of the soul. As it is not possible for a disturbed eye to apprehend accurately visible objects, so neither is it possible for a disturbed heart to devote itself to a consideration of the truth. It is necessary, then, to withdraw from the affairs of the world and, neither through the eyes nor the ears nor through any other means of perception, to introduce alien thoughts into the soul.”<sup>272</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “A pure prayer finds its way to God, since it speaks to Him, listens to Him, and trusts in Him.”

**952. What does praying in the room mean in the Lord Christ’s words: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt. 6:6)?**

**St. Aphrahat** follows **Origen**<sup>273</sup> in understanding this to mean that the proper place for prayer is within; that is, in a person’s heart. We also find this understanding in **St. Ephrem’s** work, “Hymns on Faith.”<sup>274</sup>

**St. Aphrahat** says, “Purity of heart is a prayer, more so than all the prayers which are prayed in a loud voice, and silence being joined together with a luminous mind is better than the loud voice when a person cries out. My beloved, now give me your heart and your mind, and hear about the power of pure prayer and see how our righteous forefathers were triumphant before God through their prayer and how it became a pure offering (Mal. 1:11) for them.

For the offerings were accepted through prayer (Gen. 4:4).

And it furthermore changed the flood (Gen. 8:20–22).

And it healed barrenness (Gen. 18; 1 Sam. 1–2).

And it destroyed armies (Josh. 12).

And it revealed the mysteries (Ex. 3:2).

And it divided the sea (Ex. 14; Josh. 4).

And it forced a passage through the Jordan (Ex. 14; Josh. 4).

And it withheld the sun and made the moon to standstill (Josh. 10:12–13).

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<sup>272</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 16.3 (FOTC 46:253).

<sup>273</sup> Origen, *On Prayer* 20.2 (ACW 19:67–68).

<sup>274</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Rhythms on Faith*, in *Selected Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian* (Wentworth Press, 2016) 20.6: pp. 172–174.

And it destroyed the unclean and it caused fire to come down (Num. 16:35; 1 Kings. 18:38; 2 Kings. 1:10).

And it shut up the heaven (1 Kings. 17:1).

And it caused to ascend from the pit (Dan. 6).

And it saved from the fire (Dan. 3).

And it delivered from the sea (Jon. 2).

And its power is very great, just as the power of pure fasting is great.”<sup>275</sup>

### 953. What is unceasing prayer?

Prayer without ceasing is achieved through the practice of being in the presence of God. **St. Basil** says that a monk, by his unceasing prayer and meditation, would be able “to imitate on earth the choirs of angels.”<sup>276</sup> He also says, “If he is resolved that he stands before the eyes of God, for if someone who sees his judge or ruler and converses with him does not allow his eye the liberty to roam about or look away elsewhere while he is engaged in speaking, how much more ought someone who approaches God never divert the eyes of his heart but remain intent on him who *searches hearts and inward parts* (Ps. 7:9), so that he fulfils what is written: *Lifting up holy hands without anger and argument* (1 Tim. 2:8).”<sup>277</sup>

“What do I say then? I say that we must not think that our prayer consists only of syllables. The strength of prayer lies rather in the purpose of our soul and in deeds of virtue reaching every part and moment of our life. ‘Whether you eat, or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God’ (1 Cor. 10:31). When you sit down to eat, pray. When you eat bread, do so thanking Him for being so generous to you. When you sustain your bodily weakness with wine, remember Him who supplies you with this gift, to make your heart glad and to comfort your infirmity. Has your need for taking food passed away? Let not the thought of your Benefactor pass away too. When you dress, thank the Giver of it. As you wrap your cloak around yourself, feel yet greater love to God, who alike in summer and winter has given us clothing convenient for us, both to cover what is unseemly and to preserve our life. Is the day over? Give thanks to Him who has given us the sun for our daily work, and has provided us a fire to light up the night, and to serve the rest of the needs of life. Let the night give the other occasions of prayer.

“When you look up to heaven and gaze at the beauty of the stars, pray to the Lord of the visible world; pray to God the Arch-artificer of the universe, who in wisdom has made them

<sup>275</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavanolickal (Kottayam, India: St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) 4.1: pp. 76–77.

<sup>276</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185 2* (FOTC 13:7).

<sup>277</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Rule of St Basil in Latin and English: A Revised Critical Edition*, trans., Anna M. Silvas (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) Q. 108: p. 197.

all. When you see all nature sunk in sleep, then again worship Him who gives us even against our wills release from the continuous strain of toil, and by a short refreshment restores us once again to the vigor of our strength. Let not night herself be all, as it were, the special and peculiar property of sleep. Let not half your life be useless through the senselessness of slumber. Divide the time of night between sleep and prayer. Yes, let your slumbers be themselves experiences in piety; for it is only natural that our sleeping dreams should be for the most part echoes of the anxieties of the day. As have been our conduct and pursuits, so will inevitable be our dreams. Thus will thought pray without ceasing; if thought prays not only in words, but unites itself to God through all the course of life and so your life be made one ceaseless and uninterrupted prayer.”<sup>278</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “For not without a meaning did the Apostle say, ‘Pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:17). Are we to be without ceasing bending the knee, prostrating the body, or lifting up our hands, that he says, ‘Pray without ceasing?’ Or if it is in this sense that we say that we pray, this, I believe, we cannot do without ceasing. There is another inward kind of prayer without ceasing, which is the desire of the heart. Whatever else you are doing, if you do but long for that Sabbath, you do not cease to pray. If you would never cease to pray, never cease to long after it. The continuance of your longing is the continuance of your prayer.”<sup>279</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “As the day is over and the sun sets, we remember all Your love and gifts. We pray to you, Creator of the whole world, to protect our sleep in the high places. May our dreams and imaginations disappear, and our night stays holy under Your eyes despite the envy of our enemy.” He also says: “For the prayer of the holy man pierces the clouds (cf. Sir. 35:17 (21)); but the earth, opening its mouth, hides the prayer of the sinner in the blood of the flesh, just as was said by God to the murderer Cain. ‘You are cursed from the earth which has opened its mouth to receive the blood of your brother from your hand, when you will till the earth’ (Gen. 4:11).”<sup>280</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “The Hebrews were required to appear before the Lord (Ex. 23:17) three times a year. What justice was that? What was there so extraordinary in appearing before God three time a year? In Exodus, the Sacred Scripture was speaking to little ones; here, however, the prophet is urging those who believe in God to seek Him always, as the New Testament bids us that we pray (1 Thess. 5:17) without ceasing.”<sup>281</sup>

“When we leave the shelter that keeps us safe (our homes), let us make prayer our weapon. And when we come back home, let us pray before we sit down. We should not give the toiled body rest before the soul is nourished.”

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<sup>278</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homily on the Martyr Julitta* (NPNF II/8:1xix) amended.

<sup>279</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 38.13 (NPNF I/8:107) amended.

<sup>280</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *The Prayer of Job and David* 1.8.27 (FOTC 65:347).

<sup>281</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 31 (FOTC 48:231).



“We should not start eating before praying first and before we leave the table, we should give thanks to our Creator.”

**Theophan the Recluse** says, “‘Pray without ceasing,’ St. Paul writes to the Thessalonians. And in other epistles, he commands: ‘Praying always with all supplication in the spirit’ (Eph. 6:18), ‘continue in prayer and watch in the same’ (Col. 4:2), ‘continuing steadfastly in prayer’ (Rom. 12:12). Also the Savior Himself teaches the need for constancy and persistency in prayer, in the parable about the about the importunate widow, who won over the unrighteous judge by the persistency of her appeals (Luke 18:1–8). It is clear from this that unceasing prayer is not an accidental prescription, but the essential characteristic of the Christian spirit. The life of a Christian, according to the Apostle, ‘is hid with Christ in God’ (Col. 3:3). So the Christian must live in God continuously, with attention and feeling: to do this is to pray without ceasing. We are also taught that every Christian is ‘the temple of God,’ in which ‘the Spirit of God dwells’ (1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19; Rom. 8:9). It is this ‘Spirit,’ always present and pleading in him, that prays within him ‘with groanings that cannot be uttered’ (Rom. 8:26), and so teaches him how to pray without ceasing.”<sup>282</sup>

**Evagrius Ponticus** says of prayer without ceasing: “We have not been commanded to work, to keep vigil, and to fast at all times, but the law of unceasing prayer (1 Thess. 5:17) has been handed down to us. In fact, those things which heal the passionate part of the soul require also the body to put them into practice, and the latter because of its weakness is not sufficient for these labours. Prayer, on the other hand, invigorates and purifies the mind for the struggle, since it is naturally constituted for prayer, even without this body, and for fighting the demons on behalf of all the powers of the soul.”<sup>283</sup>

“Pray without ceasing (cf. 1 Thess. 5:17), and remember Christ who begot you.”<sup>284</sup>

“If you, being in the flesh, have a desire to serve God like the spiritual beings (the angels), then strive to have unceasing prayer hidden in your heart. In so doing, you will begin to resemble the angels, even before you die.”

“With every breath you take, remember the name of Jesus exultantly, while remembering death with humility. These two exercises guarantee progress towards greatness of soul.”

“Just as the body, when the soul leaves it, becomes dead and putrid; so also the soul that is without fervent prayer is dead and putrid. Lack of prayer is to the soul a greater evil than

<sup>282</sup> Theophan the Recluse, quoted in Chariton of Valamo (Igumen), *The Art of Prayer: An Orthodox Anthology*, trans., E. Kadloubovsky and E.M. Palmer, ed., Timothy Ware (Faber & Faber, 1966): pp. 81–82.

<sup>283</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, “The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life” in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies)*, trans., Robert E. Sinkewicz., ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford University Press, 2003) 49: p. 106.

<sup>284</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, “Exhortation to a Virgin” in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus (Oxford Early Christian Studies)*, trans., Robert E. Sinkewicz., ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford University Press, 2003) 5: p. 131.

death. Daniel the prophet illustrates this when he is ready to die rather than be forbidden from praying at any time. A person should remember God more often than he breathes in the air.”

#### **954. What is the connection between unceasing prayer and the virtuous life?**

**St. John Cassian** says, “And there is between these two a sort of reciprocal and inseparable union. For just as the crown of the building of all virtues is the perfection of prayer, so unless everything has been united and compacted by this as its crown, it cannot possibly continue strong and stable. For lasting and continual calmness in prayer, of which we are speaking, cannot be secured or consummated without them, so neither can those virtues which lay its foundations be fully gained without persistence in it.”<sup>285</sup>

**Abba Isaac** says, “For otherwise we shall not be able to carry out that charge [to pray unceasingly] unless our mind, purified from all stains of sin, and given over to virtue as to its natural good, feed on the continual contemplation of Almighty God.”<sup>286</sup>

**Abba Hesychius of Jerusalem** rebukes Bildad, Job’s friend, because he said to Job, “earnestly seek God and make your supplication to the Almighty” (Job 8:5). Hesychius says, “Was Job not always praying throughout his life? ... He did not just pray unceasingly but he used to offer his prayers early in the morning (Job 1:5), during the day and at every moment. He praised God seven times every day (Ps. 119:37, 164), morning and evening as for him, this was not foolishness. The end of his trials and struggles showed that he was a man of prayer.”

#### **955. Why does the apostle call us to pray without ceasing?**

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “Call upon God to open the eyes of your heart, so that you may see the value of prayer and of spiritual reading when understood and applied.”<sup>287</sup>

“Blessed Paul urges us not to neglect prayer for any reason, so he says, ‘pray without ceasing’ (1 Thess. 5:17). Moreover, he mentions discipline of thoughts [in prayer] when he says, ‘Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.’ (Rom. 12:2) ... The apostle Paul directs us to the perfect will of God, wishing that we completely escape condemnation. And knowing that prayer helps us to obey all the commandments, he does not cease from advising us to pray by all means, saying, ‘Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to the end with all perseverance’ (Eph. 6:18).”

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<sup>285</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.2 (NPNF II/11:388).

<sup>286</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 9.3 (NPNF II/11:388).

<sup>287</sup> St. Mark the Ascetic, “On the Spiritual Law, Two Hundred Texts” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 7: p. 110.

“We should therefore set about our task, for by doing so and advancing steadily we will find that hope in God, sure faith, inner knowledge, release from temptations, gifts of grace, heartfelt confession and prolonged tears come to the faithful through prayer. For not only these blessings, but the patient acceptance of affliction, sincere forgiveness of our neighbor, knowledge of the spiritual law, the discovery of God's justice, frequent visitations of the Holy Spirit, the giving of spiritual treasures and all that God has promised to bestow to men of faith now and in the future age — in short, the manifestation of the soul in accordance with the image of God — can come only through God's grace and man's faith when he guards his mind with great humility and undistracted prayer.”<sup>288</sup>

“If you understand what is said by St. Paul in a mystical sense, that ‘we wrestle ... against spiritual wickedness’ (Eph. 6:12), you will also understand the parable of the Lord, which He spoke ‘to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to lose heart’ (Luke. 18:1).”<sup>289</sup>

### **956. Does prayer without ceasing justify a neglect of performing actions?**

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “Whoever wants to reach ‘the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ’ (Eph. 4:13) must not prefer any work over prayer, yet he should still undertake other work lest be in need ... He must not refrain from doing the essential duties required by divine law on the excuse that he is devoting himself to prayer. He should distinguish between prayer and work, obeying the divine law without question [i.e., do both together].”

### **957. How can one deal with distracting thoughts that disturb prayer?**

**First:** Cling to the Lord. **St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Sit before His face all your time, thinking of Him and recollecting Him in your heart, lest, seeing Him only after long you should not lack freedom of speech with Him on account of bashfulness. A high degree of freedom of speech is born from constant intercourse. Constant intercourse with men is of a bodily nature; that with God is psychic meditation and offerings in prayers ... For the heart of those who seek the Lord rejoices. Seek the Lord, you sinners and be strengthened in hope in your thoughts. Seek His face by repentance at all times and you will be sanctified by the holiness of His face and you will be purified from your unrighteousness. Speed unto the Lord, you unrighteous, the Lord who forgives unrighteousness and effaces sins.”<sup>290</sup>

<sup>288</sup> Hesychios the Priest, “On Watchfulness and Holiness,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 61: p. 172.

<sup>289</sup> St. Mark the Ascetic, “On Those who Think that They are Made Righteous by Works” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 147: p. 137.

<sup>290</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 5 (73): p. 50 amended.

**Second:** Pray with the spirit of hope. **St. Augustine** says, “I seem to feel that for this reason he calls God gracious, because He bears with those failings of ours, and yet expects prayer from us, in order to make us perfect: and when we have given it to Him, He receives it gratefully, and listens to it, and does not remember those many prayers which we pour out unthinkingly, and accepts the one which we can scarcely find. For what man is there, my brethren, who, on being addressed by his friend, when he wishes to answer his address, sees his friend turn away from him and speak to another, who is there who would bear this? Or if you appeal to a judge, and set him up to hear you, and all at once, while you are speaking to him, pass from him, and begin to converse with your friend, who would endure this? Yet God endures the hearts of so many persons who pray and think of different things ... What then? Must we despair of mankind, and say that every man is already condemned into whose prayers any wandering thoughts have crept and interrupted them? If we say this, my brethren, I know not what hope remains. Therefore because there is some hope before God, because His mercy is great, let us say unto Him, ‘For unto You, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul’ [Ps. 86:4]. And how have I lifted it up? As I could, as You gave me strength, as I could catch it when it fled away. ... From infirmity I sink: heal me, and I shall stand: strengthen me, and I shall be strong. But until You do this, bear with me.”<sup>291</sup>

#### **958. What does “the ear of the heart” mean?**

What did Christ mean by the words: “He who has ears to hear, let him hear” (Matt. 11:15)? **St. Jerome** comments on this phrase as follows: “Isaiah says, ‘The Lord has assigned an ear to me’ (Isa. 50:4). Let us understand what he says. The Lord has assigned an ear to me, that is the ear of the heart; He has granted me an ear that hears message of God. Whatever the prophet hears, he hears in his heart. Thus, when we also cry in our hearts, ‘Abba Father!’ with a silent cry, the Lord hears this silence in the same manner as the Lord converses with our hearts that cry, ‘Abba Father’ (Rom. 8:15).”

#### **959. What is the tradition of hidden prayer among the monastic Fathers?**

Here are some excerpts from the “Paradise of The Holy Fathers” and other monastic writings:

“A brother asked an elder: ‘What is meant by the cultivation of the soul that brings forth fruits?’ He answered: ‘Cultivating the soul signifies silence, unceasing prayer, control of desires, toil of the flesh, and refraining from noticing people’s sins and only remembering one’s own shortcomings and sins. Whenever someone is steadfast in these virtues, his soul will be successful and will grow and bring forth fruits.’”

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<sup>291</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 86.7 (NPNF I/8:412) amended.

“An elder said: ‘When a monk is truly struggling, God wants him not to be attached to anything in this world, not even a single needle, so that his thoughts may be focused on remembering our Lord Jesus Christ and repenting from his sins.’”

“An elder said: ‘Acquire silence with discernment. Be concerned only with God and do not be concerned with anything that is earthly. Examine all your dealings in your rising up and your sitting down. Trust in God and do not be afraid of the wicked.’”

“One of the saints once said: ‘The Fathers have handed down this path to us: to work with our hands, to remain silent and to weep over our sins.’”

**St. John Cassian** — who recorded for us a vivid portrait of the Egyptian monastic life of his time — saw a correlation between the reading of scripture and fervent prayer. Each of these supports the other through the work of the Holy Spirit. Note that the two works of Cassian, “The Institutes” and “The Conferences” both extensively quote scripture. He emphasized that the kingdom of God is the ultimate goal of spiritual life, and that reading and contemplating upon the words of scripture serve to attain that goal. He dedicated his Conferences 9 and 10, and chapters 2 and 3 of The Institutes to the topic of prayer. He says that the prayers of the canonical hours are compulsory for the monk, and that it is the labor of the monk to transform the recitation of the psalms into personal prayers that feed his relationship with God, his God. Similarly, in studying the Holy Bible, the monk cannot be content with merely reading or reciting, but must transform the texts into contemplations emanating from his depths, so that the words of the Holy Bible seem to emerge from him as his own personal prayers.<sup>292</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 14.10 (NPNF II/11:439–440).



## 6

**The Jesus Prayer or the Arrow Prayer****960. What is the “Jesus Prayer”?**

The goal of sacred worship — and of prayer in particular — is closeness to God through constant dialogue with Him. Hence, both scripture and holy tradition provide a varied approach to prayer through which the believer is able to attain to constant prayer without ceasing. The believer begins with prayer in every work he undertakes; even before he sleeps. He participates in liturgies, prays the psalms, and his own personal prayers. To preserve his thought from distraction, he offers up prayers that cannot be counted with words or sentences, remembering always the presence of God in his life, so that he lives in a state of constant communication with Him; prayers that he can recite or repeat at any time, even when he is performing any kind of work. Being confident in the power of the name of Jesus, the believer repeats it often. This is what we call the Jesus Prayer.

The Desert Fathers often recited this prayer or other short prayers, which represent a cry to the Lord. **St. Augustine** used to repeat this prayer: “Make haste, O God, to deliver me. Make haste to help me, O Lord” (Ps. 70:1); and he encouraged the faithful to repeat it on every occasion: at home; at work; while eating or drinking; while awake or asleep; in grief or joy; when spiritually zealous or lukewarm in worship — for this prayer is particularly helpful. St. Augustine used to call this short prayer, “the arrow prayer,” for it shoots an arrow into the heart of the devil and prevents him from distracting our thoughts so long as we pray it. **St. John of the Ladder (Climacus)** urges us to employ this short prayer saying, “Let your prayer be completely simple. For both the publican and the prodigal son were reconciled to God by a single phrase.”<sup>293</sup>

**961. Are there other short prayers that can be considered as arrow prayers?**

**St. John Chrysostom** gives us a few examples of short prayers:

O Lord, of Your heavenly bounties, deprive me not.

O Lord, forgive me if I have sinned in my mind or my thought, whether in word or in deed.

O Lord, deliver me from every temptation and from eternal torments.

O Lord, enlighten my heart which evil desires have darkened.

<sup>293</sup> St. John Climacus, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 28.5: p. 251.

O Lord, see the feebleness of my soul, and send down Your grace to help me, that I may glorify Your name.

O Lord, sprinkle into my heart the dew of Your grace.

O Lord, receive me in penitence and forsake me not.

O Lord, give me tears and remembrance of death, and contrition.

O Lord, give me humility, chastity, and obedience.

O Lord, give me patience, magnanimity, and meekness.

O Lord, let Your will be done in me, sinner, through the intercessions and prayers of the pure Virgin Saint Mary and all Your saints, for blessed are You unto the ages. Amen.<sup>294</sup>

### **962. Did St. Ephrem the Syrian use arrow prayers?**

The Nisibene Hymns (*Carmina Nisibena*) of **St. Ephrem the Syrian**<sup>295</sup> are characterized by having harmonious, rhythmic stanzas that are suitable for church gatherings. Usually, each stanza is followed by a refrain that is sung with a special melody and can be prayed by anyone during their communal as well as personal worship, to help him offer his prayers with a spirit of hope and joy, and feel the divine presence. These are similar to arrow prayers or the Jesus Prayer, in that they represent a cry to God.

### **963. Does the Paradise of the Fathers refer to the Jesus Prayer?**

The Paradise of the Fathers mentions some practical exercises that relate to the practice of the Jesus Prayer under the heading of “Calling on the name of the Lord Jesus.”<sup>296</sup> Here are some examples:

“An elder said: ‘For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, as the Apostle says (Col. 2:9). Therefore, we can never accept the thought of the defiled demons who claim that by calling on the name of Jesus we are not calling the Father or the Holy Spirit. For they do so out of their craftiness, denying us the utterance of the sweet name of our Lord Jesus Christ because they know that without this name there is no salvation as St. Peter the Apostle says: ‘There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12). We have no doubt whatsoever that by calling on the name of our Lord Jesus, we are also calling the Father and the Holy Spirit; for we can never accept any division in the Godhead and we know that our Lord Jesus is the Mediator through whom men can draw near

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<sup>294</sup> Twenty-four prayers — a prayer for each hour — traditionally ascribed to St. John Chrysostom.

<sup>295</sup> See NPNF II/13:165ff.

<sup>296</sup> See the Arabic extended version of the *Paradise of the Fathers* published by the Monastery of St. Macarius.



God and talk to Him, according to the saying of the Apostle: ‘He has in these last days, spoken to us by His Son’ (Heb. 1:2).”

“An elder gave a parable: ‘A man in a certain village had a beautiful sister. When it was a feast in that village, she asked him to let her go to where the feast was celebrated. Her brother feared to send her on her own for he did not want anyone to hurt her because of her beauty. So he took her by the hand and went with her. Wherever they went, he held her hands because he said in his heart: ‘if she were to be inclined to any foolishness, she would not be able to act on it as long as I am holding her hands.’ Then, the elder said: ‘Likewise, as long as the soul remembers the name of the Lord Jesus Christ who became her brother according to the economy, He will continue holding her hands even if she compromised with some thoughts or worldly desires. She will never fulfill the act of sin because her brother is holding her hands. And if the unseen enemies were to deceive her, they will not be able to do anything because her brother is holding her hands if she were to cling to the saving name of the Lord Jesus Christ, “not letting go of Him” (Song 3:4). Do you see my beloved how clinging to the good remembrance of the name of our Lord Jesus Christ is a great salvation, a stronghold, an undefeated weapon and a seal of salvation for the soul? Therefore, do not hesitate to acquire such treasure that can never be robbed; this is the precious pearl of great price, that is, the name of our Lord Jesus Christ the Savior (Matt. 13:46). So if you wonder: How can I acquire such a great treasure? I will tell you: By isolating oneself from everyone, by not worrying about anything, by measurable bodily labors, and by continuously fasting. These things bring humility and true tears, and will make you feel that you are underneath the whole creation. If you fulfill all these things, you will become a child of God while still on earth and will be translated from earth to heaven while still in the flesh. Blessed are You O Lord, for You deal mercifully with our weakness that You may translate us to Your Kingdom.’”

“A brother asked an elder: ‘Father, what shall I do with this warfare against me?’ The elder said: ‘The continuous remembrance of the name of the Lord Jesus defeats it all.’”

“A brother asked an elder: ‘Abba, how can I sit in my cell?’ The elder said to him: ‘This is the work of the cell: eating once a day, hand-work, fulfilling the canonical prayers, and better than all is repeating the name of the Lord Jesus Christ without ceasing; and every now and then lift up your eyes and say: “My Lord Jesus Christ, help me; have compassion on me; I praise You, O Lord Jesus Christ.”’”

“A brother asked an elder: ‘How can I find the name of my Lord Jesus Christ?’ The elder said to him: ‘You would not be able to find it, unless you first embrace your tribulations.’”

“A brother asked an elder: ‘Tell me Father, how can I hold fast onto the name of the Lord Jesus Christ with my heart and tongue?’ The elder said to him: ‘It is written: With the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation (Rom. 10:10), if your heart is calm, it will sing the name of the Lord Jesus continuously. But if it is disturbed, you have to keep reciting the name of the Lord with your tongue until the mind gets accustomed to it. Thus, when God sees your labor, He will send help to you when He

sees the desire of your heart and will thus scatter the thoughts of the adversary that fight against the soul.”

“It was said that the demons fought voraciously against Abba Hilarion. One night, he began to hear the sound of crying babies, grunting sheep, lowing oxen, wailing of women, roaring of lions, shouting of an army and other loud cries. He got scared from all these noises even without seeing anything. Then, he realized that these were evil spirits, so he knelt down and made the sign of the cross on his forehead. He was calmed for a moment but then, he looked up to see and in the light of the moon, a chariot with soldiers hastening above him, so he called on the name of Jesus and the earth opened up suddenly before his eyes and swallowed the whole scene. Hilarion then said: ‘The horse and its rider, He has thrown into the sea’ (Ex. 15:1), and ‘Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the Lord our God’ (Ps. 20:7).”

“It was said that Aristaenete, the wife of Elpidius, the Roman governor, on her return from a visit to St. Anthony the Great in Egypt, was delayed in Gaza because her three children felt ill with a disease known as ‘semi-tertian ague’ [which is like tertian malaria that typically flares up or recurs every 48 hours]. Physicians gave up on a cure and their mother kept weeping. She then heard of the presence of a monk in the nearby wilderness, so she forgot all about her important status, and driven by her motherhood, she hastened to him, riding on a donkey with her maiden servants. She said to the saint: ‘I entreat you for the sake of Christ our God, I beg you for the sake of His Cross and Blood, to save my three children so that His name may be glorified among the pagans.’ At first, the saint refused since he had never left his cell before, and he was not accustomed to entering into a house or even a city. But the woman cast herself on the ground and screamed repeatedly: ‘O servant of God, Hilarion, give me back my children. St. Anthony kept them safe in Egypt, so you rescue them here in Syria.’ All those who were present wept and so did the saint after he declined her request. She did not leave him until he promised to come to Gaza after sunset. When he arrived there, he made the sign of the cross on the bed and on her ill children and called upon the wondrous name of Jesus. Then, the children started sweating all at once and then when they recovered they recognized their mother, and everyone kissed the saint’s hands in gratitude.”

#### **964. What is the story of the Russian pilgrim who longed to enjoy the practice of the Jesus Prayer?**

The story of the anonymous Russian pilgrim who longed to enjoy the Jesus Prayer was first published in Russia in 1865, and translated into several languages including Arabic.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>297</sup> See R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974). Arabic translation published by St. George Church, Sporting, Alexandria. A summarized version was published as part of the first edition of Fr. Matthew the Poor, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, in Arabic (1952) and in English by St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press (2003). A large number of books that discuss *The Way of a Pilgrim* have been published in English, but also in Arabic in both Egypt and Lebanon.

This book is not just a story, but an inspiring spiritual journey that is essential to the Christian and was practiced by the Fathers of the Church in one form or another.

It was said of this Russian pilgrim that he was astonished when he entered a church and heard the words of the epistle being read: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17). He began to ponder, “is it possible for a person to perform a single work for the whole of his life?” The Russian pilgrim narrates that he lived without a stable shelter, but instead wandered from one place to another, carrying nothing with him except for a basket on his back with some dry bread, and a Holy Bible. One day, he went to church and heard St. Paul’s words: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17, see also Eph. 6:18, 1 Tim. 2:8). He opened his Holy Bible and read the verse again and began to contemplate how he could fulfil this commandment when he was occupied with many cares. How could he pray at all times and in all places? He decided to travel from church to church to find the most famous preachers and spiritual guides with the best reputations, so that he could ask them for a practical answer to these questions. They spoke to him of the importance of prayer and its fruits, but he found no one who could speak to him of true prayer without ceasing.

He heard of a gentleman in a Russian village who spent all his time in prayer and reading devotional books. So, he found him and asked him how he could fulfill this commandment. The book continues: “He was silent for a while and looked at me closely. Then he said: ‘Ceaseless interior prayer is a continual yearning of the human spirit towards God. To succeed in this consoling exercise we must pray more often to God to teach us to pray without ceasing. Pray more, and pray more fervently. It is prayer itself which will reveal to you how it can be achieved unceasingly; but it will take some time.’”<sup>298</sup> Then, he offered him some food and money for his journey.

The pilgrim was afflicted with a feeling of despair because the gentleman had not answered his question. He turned again to reading and contemplation and reflected upon all that this father had said to him. But still, he could not arrive at the truth. Bemoaning his ignorance, he began to find it difficult to sleep at night.

He walked over a hundred and twenty-five miles until he reached a monastery, where there was an abbot who was loving and kind-hearted, and he spoke with him. The book continues, telling us that the abbot welcomed him, and the pilgrim asked him:

“‘How can I save my soul?’

‘What? Save your soul? Well, live according to the commandments, say your prayers, and you will be saved.’

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<sup>298</sup> R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): pp. 2–3.

‘But I hear it said that we should pray without ceasing, and I don’t know how to pray without ceasing. I cannot even understand what unceasing prayer means. I beg you, Father, explain this to me.’

‘I don’t know how to explain further, dear brother. But stop a moment, I have a little book, and it is explained there.’ And he handed me St. Dmitri’s<sup>299</sup> book on *The Spiritual Education of the Inner Man*, saying, ‘Look, read this page.’

I began to read as follows: ‘The words of the Apostle “*Pray without ceasing*” should be understood as referring to the creative prayer of the understanding. The understanding can always be reaching out towards God, and pray to Him unceasingly.’

‘But,’ I asked, ‘what is the method by which the understanding can always be turned towards God, never be disturbed, and pray without ceasing?’

‘It is very difficult, even for one to whom God Himself gives such a gift,’ replied the Abbot.<sup>300</sup>

The pilgrim’s confusion only increased. He spent the night at the monastery and in the morning, he continued his journey for five days, continuing to read the Holy Bible. On the way, he met an old man who told him that there was an experienced monk in a nearby monastery. As they walked together to the monastery, he chatted with the old man about the topic of prayer without ceasing. The old man told him the following:

- a. This question needs spiritual understanding and not academic teaching.
- b. Some employ worldly wisdom inappropriately to explain divine matters. Some think that preparatory good works are necessary before prayer. On the contrary, prayer is the mother of virtues and good works.
- c. The apostle testifies that prayer has the priority over good works when he says, “I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made” (1 Tim. 2:1). Without prayer, no good work can be performed; and without prayer, we cannot know how to encounter God and enter into dialogue with Him.

As they spoke, they came up to the monastery and the end of their conversation, so the pilgrim hastened to ask the wise old man:

“Be so kind, Reverend Father, as to show me what prayer without ceasing means and how it is learnt. I see you know all about these things.’

He took my request kindly and asked me into his cell. ‘Come in,’ said he; ‘I will give you a volume of the holy Fathers from which with God’s help you can learn about prayer clearly

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<sup>299</sup> Author’s Note: Dmitri of Rostov (1651–1709).

<sup>300</sup> R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): pp. 3–4.

and in detail.’ We went into his cell and he began to speak as follows. ‘The continuous interior Prayer of Jesus is a constant uninterrupted calling upon the divine Name of Jesus with the lips, in the spirit, in the heart; while forming a mental picture of His constant presence, and imploring His grace, during every occupation, at all times, in all places, even during sleep. The appeal is couched in these terms, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” One who accustoms himself to this appeal experiences as a result so deep a consolation and so great a need to offer the prayer always, that he can no longer live without it, and it will continue to voice itself within him of its own accord. Now do you understand what prayer without ceasing is?’

‘Yes indeed, Father, and in God’s name teach me how to gain the habit of it,’ I cried, filled with joy.

‘Read this book,’ he said. ‘It is called *The Philokalia*,<sup>301</sup> and it contains the full and detailed science of constant and interior prayer, set forth by twenty-five holy Fathers. The book is marked by a lofty wisdom and is so profitable to use that it is considered the foremost and best manual of the contemplative spiritual life’ ...

He opened the book, found the instruction by St. Symeon the New Theologian, and read: ‘Sit down alone and in silence. Lower your head, shut your eyes, breathe out gently and imagine yourself looking into your own heart. Carry your mind, *i.e.*, your thoughts, from your head to your heart. As you breathe out, say, “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.” Say it moving your lips gently, or simply say it in your mind. Try to put all other thoughts aside. Be calm, be patient, and repeat the process frequently.’<sup>302</sup>

The old man asked the pilgrim to return to him so he could monitor his progress, and for honest confession, for it is silly to attempt such spiritual works without a guide to mentor us. The pilgrim felt a powerful desire to experience interior and continual prayer. The pilgrim learned that there was a village near the monastery, so he went and sought accommodation there, in order to remain near the old man. He found work tending the garden of a peasant for the summer, and was provided with a small, isolated hut in which to live.

For a week he followed the instructions of the old man, but he was soon beset by feelings of laziness and boredom and sleepiness. Certain thoughts assailed him, so he began to read the words of the Fathers and force himself to recite the Jesus Prayer. He confessed all this to the old man, who then asked him to repeat the prayer three thousand times a day, while standing or sitting, lying down or walking. The pilgrim received this instruction with joy and returned to his hut. It was difficult for the first two days, but after that it became an easy matter, so that whenever he ceased, he felt an urge to continue again.

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<sup>301</sup> *Philokalia* ... “The Love of Spiritual Beauty.” The title of the great collection of mystical and ascetic writings by Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, over a period of eleven centuries.

<sup>302</sup> R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): pp. 8–10.

He returned to the old man, who told him to stay calm and to increase the number of recitations with the grace of God. He returned to his hut and continued to recite the prayer for a whole week without much trouble. And he learned how to keep his mind from distraction. The old man then said to him: “Now I give you permission to say your Prayer as often as you wish and as often as you can. Try to devote every moment you are awake to the Prayer, call on the Name of Jesus Christ without counting the number of times, and submit yourself humbly to the will of God, looking to Him for help. I am sure He will not forsake you, and that He will lead you into the right path.”<sup>303</sup>

The pilgrim goes on to say, “After no great lapse of time I had the feeling that the Prayer had, so to speak, by its own action passed from my lips to my heart. That is to say, it seemed as though my heart in its ordinary beating began to say the words of the Prayer within each beat. Thus for example, *one*, ‘Lord,’ *two*, ‘Jesus,’ *three*, ‘Christ,’ and so on. I gave up saying the Prayer with my lips, I simply listened carefully to what my heart was saying. It seemed as though my eyes looked right down into it; and I dwelt upon the words of my departed mentor when he was telling me about this joy. Then I felt something like a pain in my heart, and in my thoughts so great a love for Jesus Christ that I pictured myself, if only I could see Him, throwing myself at His feet and not letting them go from my embrace, kissing them tenderly, and thanking Him with tears for having of His love and grace allowed me to find so great a consolation in His Name, me, His unworthy and sinful creature! ...”<sup>304</sup>

“Again I started off on my wanderings. But now I did not walk along as before, filled with care. The calling upon the Name of Jesus Christ gladdened my way. Everybody was kind to me, it was as though everyone loved me.”<sup>305</sup>

Without doubt, this love he experienced from others was the result of their being attracted to the pilgrim, because of the joy that shone from his face and his behavior that reflected his enjoyment of the Jesus Prayer without ceasing.

### **965. How can someone with family commitments implement the practice of this pilgrim?**

The prayer practices described by this pilgrim have been practiced both by monastics and married people for many generations. Each person practices this prayer according to his own circumstances and abilities. From this pilgrim, we learn a number of things:

- a. Faith in the power of the name of Jesus and of calling upon Him.

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<sup>303</sup> R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): pp. 15–16.

<sup>304</sup> R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): pp. 19–20.

<sup>305</sup> R. M. French, (trans.), *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974): p. 17.

- b. Awareness that prayer is the mother of virtues and good deeds.
- c. Concern for nurturing conversation with the Lord Christ, whether in communal or personal worship, as part of any work, or while eating, drinking, sleeping, etc.
- d. To ask for the grace of God to work in our lives, bestowing patience in our striving with a spirit of humility.
- e. In our spiritual exercises, we should be chiefly concerned with focusing our attention on interior prayer if we wish our lives to be fruitful.
- f. The confession of our weaknesses and sins, and our need for the mercy of God.
- g. That we need times of silence in order to hear to the voice of God.
- h. The focusing of our attention on attaining salvation and forgiveness of sins.
- i. Even though the Jesus Prayer is extremely simple with few words, **St. John Chrysostom** reminds us of the awe with which the seraphim utter this name, as they glorify Him and worship Him; so, let us not practice this prayer carelessly.
- j. The need to appreciate the power of the name of our Lord Jesus.

**966. What do the Holy Bible and the Fathers say about the power of the name of our Lord Jesus?**

The Lord Christ granted His name to His disciples, not only so they could perform wonders, heal the sick, and cast out demons — He assured them of the power of His name when He said, “Whatever you ask the Father in My name, He will give you” (John 16:23). Thus, by His name we approach the Father and enjoy His eternal glories. Indeed, the seventy apostles came to understand the power of the name of Jesus, as is evident from their words upon their return from their mission: “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name!” (Luke 10:17). Isaiah the prophet, in his song of thanksgiving, expressed the power of the name of God, saying, “The desire of our soul is for Your name, and for the remembrance of You. With my soul I have desired You in the night. Yes, by my spirit within me I will seek you early” (Isa. 26:8–9).

**St. John Climacus** (of the ladder) says, “Flog your enemies with the name of Jesus, for there is no stronger weapon in heaven or earth.”<sup>306</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “He among those who do not yet believe in God and who despises the name of God confesses the power of the Most Holy One when the rays of the truth shine upon him.”

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<sup>306</sup> St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 21.7: p. 172.

**St. Barsanuphius and St. John** say, “The remembrance of God’s name utterly destroys all that is evil and wicked.”

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “If any disbelieve the power of the Crucified, let him ask the devils.”<sup>307</sup>

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says,

“Jesus, glorious name,  
Secret bridge which leads  
across from death to life,  
to you I have come and stopped,  
at *yod* your letter I am held.  
Be a bridge for my speech,  
that it may cross to the truth.  
Make your love a bridge for your servant:  
by you let me cross to your Father.  
Let me cross and say  
‘Blessed be he who made his might gentle through his Child.’”<sup>308</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** speaks of the practice of the Jesus Prayer, saying, “It is not becoming that great things should fall into our hands easily: lest the gift of God should be thought to be cheap because of its being acquired without difficulty. All that is acquired with labour, is guarded with caution. Thirst after Jesus; then he will satisfy you with his love. Shut your eyes to the precious things of the world; then you will be deemed worthy of a peace given by God to reign in your heart.”<sup>309</sup>

**St. Gregory the Theologian** says that all Christians should repeat the name of the Lord in their prayer, more times than the number of their breaths: “Not only should we pray the name of Jesus Christ without ceasing, but we must also practice it and teach it others, to every person on the face of the earth, for it is fitting and beneficial for all.”

**St John Cassian** says, “It is not some kind of imagination, conversation, or mere words — it is like a spark that flies off that burning coal which is the movement of the heart, and from the activity of the inextinguishable Spirit who raises the mind above every materialistic thing which can be seen or touched; and thus he pours out his prayers with groanings and sorrows which cannot be uttered.”

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<sup>307</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 13.3 (NPNF II/7:82).

<sup>308</sup> Robert Murray, St. Ephrem’s Dialogue of Reason and Love, in *Sobornost*, vol 2, no 2 (1980): p 30. See St. Ephrem’s “The Pearl, or Seven Rhythms on Faith” in *Rhythms: Select Works of S. Ephrem the Syrian*, trans., J. B. Morris (London: John Henry Parker; F. and J. Rivington, 1847) 6.6: pp. 130–131.

<sup>309</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 3 (33–34): p. 24 amended.



**St. John Chrysostom** says, “I implore you, brethren, never to neglect the rule of this prayer. Whenever you eat, drink, travel, or do anything, cry without ceasing: ‘Lord, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me!’” He also says, “Do not estrange your heart from God, but abide in Him and guard your heart always by remembering the Lord Jesus Christ, until the name of the Lord becomes rooted in the heart and it ceases to think of anything else. May Christ be glorified in you.”<sup>310</sup>

**Abba Agathon** says, “There is no labor greater than praying to God. For every time a man wants to pray, his enemies the demons try to prevent him; for they know that nothing obstructs them so much as prayer to God. In everything else that a man undertakes, if he perseveres he will attain rest. But in order to pray a man must struggle to his last breath.”<sup>311</sup>

**St. Athanasius** says, “Christ did not command us to fill our prayers with ten thousand phrases and to come before Him merely to recite them . . . We do not come to teach Him, but to wrestle with Him; that we may cling to Him with the persistent cry: ‘Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner!’ He is living and active, working day after day for the salvation of all.”

#### **967. How did St. John of Dalyatha practice silent prayer without ceasing?**

**St. John of Dalyatha**<sup>312</sup> says, “Blessed is the one who forgets about worldly converse to speak with You, for all his needs are filled by You. You are his food and drink; You are his joy and his exultation. You are his garment, in your glory his nakedness is clothed (cf. 2 Cor. 5:3). You are his dwelling and his resting place, and he always goes within You to be protected. You are his sun and his day, and in your light he sees hidden mysteries. You are the father who generated him, and like a child he calls You: *Father!* (Rom. 8:15). You placed the Spirit of your Son in his heart (cf. Rom. 5:5; 2 Cor. 1:22).”<sup>313</sup>

#### **968. How did St. Isaac the Syrian practice prayer without ceasing?**

**St. Isaac the Syrian** relays to us his experience, saying, “When the spirit takes its dwelling-place in a man, he does not cease to pray, because the spirit will constantly pray in him. Then, neither when he sleeps, nor when he is awake, will prayer be cut off from his soul; but when he eats, and when he drinks, when he lies down, or when he does any work,

<sup>310</sup> *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart.*

<sup>311</sup> Benedicta Ward. *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection.* Trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984): pp. 21–22.

<sup>312</sup> Also known as St. John Saba or simply, The Spiritual Elder.

<sup>313</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 51.3–4: p. 246.

even when he is immersed in sleep, the perfumes of prayer will breathe in his soul spontaneously.”<sup>314</sup>

**969. How did the scholar Origen experience the power of invoking the name of Jesus Christ?**

The scholar **Origen** often spoke of the power of the name of Jesus, and his confidence in achieving conquest and victory over sin and the devil, and over all the powers of darkness. He says, “Through His name, many demons are cast out of people; especially if it is prayed in a spiritual and sound manner with all confidence. Great is the name of Jesus, and effective and blessed. The name of Jesus heals those who are suffering mentally, dispels the spirits of darkness, and grants healing to the sick.”

**970. How did St. Augustine practice continual prayer through the name of Jesus?**

Having experienced the power of the name of Jesus in his repentance from sin, **St. Augustine** proclaimed, saying, “No one can pray in the name of the Savior if he is praying for something other than salvation.”

**971. What does St. Anthony say about the practice of the Jesus Prayer?**

“If you sit in your cell, work with your hands, while repeating the name of Jesus. Hold it fast in your heart and mind and sing it with your tongue: ‘My Lord Jesus, help me,’ ‘I praise You my Lord Jesus Christ.’”

**972. What did St. Macarius the Great say about the practice of the Jesus Prayer?**

“Always remember the holy name, our Lord Jesus Christ. This is the pearl which the wise merchant purchased (Matt. 13:45–46) by selling all the desires of his heart, brought into the inner rooms of his house, and found it sweeter than honey in his mouth. He who keeps this jewel in his heart shall be granted a great reward in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**973. Did David the prophet practice something similar to the Jesus Prayer?**

He sings, saying, “Oh, how I love Your law. It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). “My voice You shall hear in the morning. In the morning I will direct it to You, And I will look up” (Ps. 5:3). “O God You are my God. Early I will seek you” (Ps. 63:1). “Evening, morning, and at noon, I will pray and cry aloud, and He shall hear my voice” (Ps. 55:17).

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<sup>314</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 35 (259): p. 174.

**974. Do the liturgical prayers of the Church invite us to practice the Jesus Prayer?**

The daily praises are full of examples of the power of the name of our Lord Jesus in our lives. They call us to sincerely practice the Jesus Prayer in different ways.

In the eighth part of the **Theotokia of Sunday** we invoke the Jesus Prayer, saying, “Seven times everyday I will praise Your name with all my heart, O God of everyone. I remembered Your name and I was comforted ...”

In the **Psali of Monday**, we sing, “Everyone who says ‘My Lord Jesus’ is likened to a sword, casting down the enemy ... His holy name is always in their mouths ... Gather all of my senses to praise and glorify my Lord Jesus ... Jesus is my Lord, Jesus is my God, Jesus is the hope, of Christians ... An aroma, that is very expensive, is Your holy name, O my Lord Jesus ... The adornment of our souls and the joy of our hearts is Your holy name, O my Lord Jesus.”

In the **Psali of Tuesday**, we are reminded that the name of Jesus is the spring of living water, sweeter than honey in our mouths. The hearts of all who experience the name of the Lord rejoice, and their bodies flourish; and the minds of all who utter the name are illuminated, and their hearts ascend to the heights.

In the **Psali of Wednesday**, we sing, “Let them rejoice and be happy, those who seek the Lord, who are constantly calling upon His holy name ... We do not ask for the wealth of this world, but for the salvation of our souls, by calling upon His holy name.”

In the **Psali of Friday**, we sing, “This is the name of salvation of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

And in the **Psali of Saturday** we sing, “O name full of glory, O name full of blessings, O my Lord Jesus Christ, my good Savior. The perfection of all blessings is in Your holy name ...”

**975. How can we persevere in the practice of the Jesus Prayer?**

To persevere in the practice of the Jesus Prayer is to persevere in seeking to encounter the Lord Jesus and to surrender our hearts to Him, that His kingdom may abide within them. The scholar **Origen** says, “Let us search for Him with abundant labor that we may find that for which we search in abundance ... He is within us.”

**976. What practical steps can one take to practice the Jesus Prayer?**

**First:** Concentrate all your thoughts on our Lord Jesus Himself. Remember the name of Jesus slowly, gently, and calmly.

**Second:** Let the recitation of the name be from the soul’s inner depths, without loudness or violence, even internally. When Elijah was commanded to stand before the Lord and

prepare to encounter Him, he was told, “‘Stand on the mountain’ ... and behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces, but the Lord was not in the wind. And after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. And after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire, And after the fire a small voice. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out and stood in the entrance of the cave. Suddenly a voice came to him and said, ‘What are you doing here Elijah?’” (1 Kings 19:1–13).

**Third:** Recite your prayer in serenity and simplicity, or more specifically, with gentleness. As a bird that flies up to the height it intends and then gently glides, flapping its wings only from time to time to maintain its altitude, so the soul, if it flies up to glide upon the thought of Christ Jesus and is sated by remembering Him, can cease to repeat the holy name and instead rest in other thoughts; namely, thinking about Jesus. It is natural for moments of lukewarmness to intrude upon this practice. But if at any time you begin your recitation once more, you find the name of Jesus upon your lips spontaneously, and returning to your thoughts continually, silently, and internally. Thus, you will experience the verse: “I sleep but my heart is awake” (Song 5:2). However, this prayer cannot be prayed inattentively: “Because of the fragrance of your ointment, the virgins love you. Draw me away; the daughters of Jerusalem will run after you” (Song 1:3–4).

**Fourth:** We should be drawn toward the name of Jesus by the guidance of the Holy Spirit, so that calling on the name of Jesus becomes in our lives one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit Himself.

**Fifth:** We should be careful not to despise other forms of prayer.

**Sixth:** We must forget ourselves and put our egos to death while the name of the Holy God comes alive in our spirits: “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30).

**Seventh:** Repetition of the Jesus Prayer should not lessen our participation in the divine liturgy or in other Church rites such as the Midnight Praises.

**Eighth:** The best kind of prayer is that which is prayed when we are moved by the Holy Spirit.

**Ninth:** The goal of the Jesus Prayer is to praise Him, crying out with Thomas the apostle: “My Lord and God!” (John 20:28). We should be concerned most of all with the Lord of glory, Jesus, being present in our lives.

**Tenth:** Calling on the name of Jesus grants us salvation in every kind of need in our lives.

**Eleventh:** Through the name of Jesus, we receive more than we ask: “Whatever you ask the father in my name, He will give you. Until now you have asked nothing in My name. Ask and you will receive” (John 16:23–24). He is both the one who grants the gift and the gift itself, satisfying all our needs. “He became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30).

**977. How did the apostles experience the power of the name of Jesus?**

**First:** The apostles preached the name of Jesus and performed wonders in His name. They beseeched the Father saying, “Now, Lord ... by stretching Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29–30).

**Second:** The name of the Lord Jesus was magnified through the apostles (see Acts 19:17).

**Third:** The Lord Jesus declared to His disciples and to the faithful that they should receive power when the Holy Spirit descends upon them (see Acts 1:8), adding also that they will cast out demons in His name (Mark 16:17–18).

**Fourth:** The name of Jesus was the treasure of the apostles, and thus St. Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk” (Acts 3:6).

**978. What role does the name of Jesus play in the knowledge of divine mysteries?**

**First:** By repeating the name of Jesus, our inner self soars up to hear, with St. Mary, the annunciation of Gabriel the archangel that He who is to be born of her will be called Jesus; which means, the Savior. And we learn, with St. Joseph the Carpenter, that the One in St. Mary’s womb is named Jesus, since He is the Savior of the world (Matt. 1:21).

**Second:** By repeating the name of Jesus we climb Mount Tabor with Him and behold the splendor of His divinity (Matt. 17:2).

**Third:** By repeating the name of Jesus, God the Father will give us not only what we ask for, but even that for which we do not ask (John 16:24).

**Fourth:** We will experience the mystery of the Church, the mystery of the Eucharist, the power of the Holy Spirit, and more.

**Fifth:** We will understand the mysteries of God’s word and His promises.

**Sixth:** We will be made worthy of becoming a chosen vessel, bearing His name (Acts 9:15).



## 7

# Metanoias and Prostrations

### 979. What is meant by a *metanoia*?

In our discourse on worship according to the rites of the Church,<sup>315</sup> we distinguished between three forms of prostration: bowing the head; kneeling; and kneeling and bowing until the forehead touches the ground. This third form is called a *metanoia*, and is extremely important in personal worship and spiritual discipline.

### 980. What does the word *metanoia* mean?

*Metanoia* is a Greek word (μετανοία) made of two parts: *meta-* (μετα) which means to change or to elevate, and *nous* (νοῦς) which means the mind; thus, *metanoia* is the elevation of the mind or the repentance that is offered to God as a form of worshipping Him.

A *metanoia* can also be offered to one's brethren or even prophets as a form of seeking forgiveness of a particular sin committed by an individual or a congregation. In this way, the faithful honor one another and show mutual respect for one another.

Metanoias are always accompanied by making the sign of the cross and a short prayer that will differ to suit the purpose of the *metanoia*. **St. Isaac the Syrian** enjoins us to offer metanoias constantly, finding sweetness in this constancy even after three days of kneeling on the ground, praying, without feeling weary, because of the sweetness and enjoyment that the faithful find in this practice.<sup>316</sup>

### 981. What is the relationship between metanoias and repentance?

While repentance begins with the person coming back to himself like the prodigal son (Luke 15:17), it should not stop at that stage, for the believer must then rise up and return to his Father, only to find his heavenly Father running towards him, falling on his neck and bringing him back into His house, where He prepares a generous banquet in his honor (Luke 15:22–23). Then, the sorrow of the sinner will melt away, and his soul will rejoice before his Father's love for him. Metanoias, therefore, are not limited to kneeling down and touching the ground with the forehead; the believer may also beat his chest (Luke 18:13) so that His heavenly Savior might cause His kingdom to abide within it; or stretch out his hands and lift them up, looking up to heaven, proclaiming his longing to see his heavenly Father and enjoy fellowship in eternal glory.

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<sup>315</sup> See sections 889–890 above.

<sup>316</sup> See A Monk of the Baramous Monastery (H. G. Bishop Macarius), *An Introduction to Metanoias in Spiritual Direction* (Arabic), fourth printing (2002): p. 42.

What is said of repentance and the practice of metanoias may also be experienced in all kinds of worship of God, as the Church Fathers said as their hearts ascended “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18). We see this practically in the experience of the sinful woman who washed the Savior’s feet with her tears and dried them with the hair of her head, and immediately she heard Him praising her and saying to the pharisee, “Her sins which are many are forgiven because she loved much” (Luke 7:47). This biblical mindset was experienced by many Church Fathers and Mothers who practiced metanoias often, with joy and gladness, without weariness or boredom. They sang to themselves with St. Paul, saying, “our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20).

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says that whenever a person is enlightened in prayer, he will feel more keenly the need for the practice of metanoias and its importance, and perseverance in this practice becomes sweeter. Whenever he raises up his head, an overflow of fervor draws his heart to bow down, for in so doing, he will feel a strong assistance, and his joy and delight will multiply.<sup>317</sup>

In the Paradise of the Fathers we read: “A brother said: ‘What should I do Father? I am weak and the passions overcome me and I have no power to resist the thoughts.’ The elder said to him: ‘If they throw these thoughts on you, do not respond to them but flee to God with prayer or prostrations and say: O God have mercy on me and cast these thoughts away from me with Your great power for I am too weak to resist them.’ The brother said to him: ‘When I stand up to pray, I do not feel any reverence as I do not understand the words.’ The elder said to him: ‘I heard Abba Moses (or Abba Poemen) say that just like a magician does not know the significance of the words he utters but the snake understands and comes out, so is it with us, even if we did not understand what we say, the demons understand and depart away from us.’”

**Abba Isaiah** teaches beginners saying, “If you happen to sin, do not be ashamed and resort to lies, but perform a metanoia, confess your iniquity, and ask for forgiveness and you will be forgiven.” And, “If someone says a harsh word to you, do not let your heart be sorrowful or arrogant, but humbly perform a metanoia and do not blame him in your heart and do not be angry with him. If someone accuses you of something you have not done, do not be afraid but again humble yourself, perform a metanoia and say: ‘Forgive me, I will not do this again.’”

## **982. What is the relationship between metanoias and prayer?**

If prayer is the offering up of a rational sacrifice, then through metanoias, the body cooperates with the mind in this offering, as the apostle said: “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy,

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<sup>317</sup> See A Monk of the Baramous Monastery (H. G. Bishop Macarius), *An Introduction to Metanoias in Spiritual Direction* (Arabic), fourth printing (2002): p. 10.



acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1). The Lord Christ taught us the model prayer that begins with the words, “Our Father, who art in heaven,” thus granting the faithful the boldness of children who may address the Father with great daring. But they ought also to be armed with the spirit of divine fear, as He says, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master; if then I am a Father, where is my honor; and if I am a Master, where is my reverence?” (Mal. 1:6). By performing metanoias, we reveal the fear of God that is within us, without negating His Fatherhood. As a matter of nature, a son honors his father; and according to civil law, a servant obeys his employer’s instructions and cares for his well-being. A son who does not honor his father comes under the judgment of natural law, and the servant who does not obey his employer comes under the judgment of civil law. This is the case of a son or servant. But for us, according to the law of the divine grace, we ought to honor God as our Father without abusing His love and compassion. For this reason, our prayers are mingled with metanoias; especially the short arrow prayers.

**St. Isaac the Syrian** teaches us this practice: if our boredom afflicts our prayers for one reason or another, for example, if our emotions are distracted by a certain thought, we ought to perform metanoias, asking God to “nail my flesh with the fear of You” (cf. Ps. 118:120 LXX). He says, “Sow metanoias than psalms among your prayers [if a person is beset by mind-wandering when he prays the psalms and struggles with distraction of thought], and when prayer offers you her hand, she will recompense you for that which you missed from your canon.”<sup>318</sup>

Revealing the importance of metanoias, **Marinus Victorinus** says, “By kneeling we demonstrate the full form of prayer and petition. So we bend our knees. We ought not merely to incline our minds to prayer but also our bodies. We do well to lower our bodies lest we create an impression of elevation or an appearance of pride.”<sup>319</sup>

### 983. What does a believer feel when performing metanoias?

Feelings vary according to one’s motive behind the metanoias, but a feeling that is common to all metanoias is that of being in the divine presence: whether one offers them as a kind of worship like the heavenly hosts; or for repentance and confession of sins, truly yearning to return to God to enjoy His divine embrace; or as a sort of mutual love exchanged by the faithful in the spirit of humility; or in order to diffuse the spirit of anger in a brother or sister; or as a way of expressing gratitude for the good deed of a brother or a sister; or as a way to apologize and beg the forgiveness for one’s errors, whether from a person or from God; and so on. In all cases, what should occupy our minds is the divine presence and beseeching God’s acceptance and blessing.

<sup>318</sup> A Monk of the Baramous Monastery (H. G. Bishop Macarius), *An Introduction to Metanoias in Spiritual Direction* (Arabic), fourth printing (2002): p. 11.

<sup>319</sup> Marinus Victorinus (ACCOS NT 8:144). See also A Monk of the Baramous Monastery (H. G. Bishop Macarius), *An Introduction to Metanoias in Spiritual Direction* (Arabic), fourth printing (2002): p. 11.

When we perform metanoias as worship of God, we participate with the heavenly hosts in their fear of God and their rejoicing in their Creator. When we perform them for the sake of repentance, we rejoice in the work of the Savior, the Forgiver of sins, and in our encounter with Him as His sons and daughters who find our Savior's bosom open to welcome those who have returned to Him; and thus, feelings of sorrow are mingled with feelings of spiritual joy. If we perform them because of our tribulations, we kiss the feet of the Savior who said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). We should approach Him as His beloved little children, remembering His words: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 19:14; Mark 14:10). We ought also to approach Him as those who are sick and in need of a heavenly physician, remembering the words of Isaiah the prophet: "Surely, He has borne our grief, and carried our sorrows" (Isa. 53:4).

Further, by performing metanoias we submit ourselves to God as soldiers who resort to their captain, who alone is able to destroy the devil and all his schemes and disperse the darkness of the power of evil. In performing metanoias, we are occupied with submitting to the will of God and enjoy a holy tranquility and a divine righteousness. Having performed metanoias, often the heart of a believer is enflamed with yearning for heaven, so that he finds himself lifting up his hands and looking up to the heavens.

**St. Isaac the Syrian** speaks of the connection between prostration and heavenly joy: "Continuous watching together with prostrations will certainly earn the worshiper the joy of prayer. Give yourself up to prayer and you will taste the sweetness of prostrations and will thus be joyfully steadfast in them." He also invites us to offer metanoias before the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ: "There is nothing greater and more laborious in ascetical struggles, and nothing more excites envy in the demons, than if a man prostrates himself before the cross of Christ, praying night and day, and is like a convict whose hands are bound behind him."<sup>320</sup>

#### **984. How can metanoias quench the fury of anger?**

Upon hearing that his brother Esau had gone out to meet him, Jacob bowed himself to the ground seven times before his brother and thus made peace with him and dissolved away the enmity that was in the heart of Esau (Gen. 33:3). When Abigail learned that David was in a fit of anger with Nabal her husband who had insulted him, she went to meet David and fell on her face before him, calming him and preventing him from shedding blood or taking revenge (1 Sam. 25:23). David admired Abigail's wisdom and repented of his anger because of her wisdom and submissiveness. He said to her, "Blessed is your advice and blessed are you" (1 Sam. 25:33).

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<sup>320</sup> Hilarion Alfeyev, *The Spiritual World of Isaac the Syrian* (Liturgical Press, 2000): p. 151.

**985. What is the value of a metanoia if it lacks love and humility?**

A metanoia performed without humility and love becomes a sort of mockery. So did the Roman soldiers bow before Jesus in the house of the governor in order to mock Him (Matt. 27:29). Thus, **St. Isaac the Syrian** calls us to perform our metanoias with humility and love, saying: “Let your prostration be low before all men and be the first to salute; then you will be honoured more than he who brings gold from Ophir.”<sup>321</sup>

**986. Is it humiliating to perform metanoias?**

Unfortunately, some think that offering metanoias — especially before other people — is a kind of humiliation. If through prostrations in fear and trembling the heavenly beings bask in the light of the splendor of God, we also experience their awe when we participate with them in prostration. Thus does the believer experience a kind of awe when he performs metanoias in the right spirit.

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<sup>321</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 5 (76): p. 52.



## 8

### **Holy Worship and the Full Life**

#### **987. What does the Holy Bible mean by fullness and by emptiness?**

God created the human being in His image and according to His likeness (Gen. 1:27) and Adam and Eve found satiety in their Creator and heard the sound of the Lord walking in the garden (Gen. 3:8). In the Garden of Eden, they were truly a new bride and groom in their royal palace, enjoying the constant presence of the Lord who was the secret of their joy and satiety. They experienced His love in everything around them and felt no emptiness, for all earthly creatures submitted to them and served them with joy.

But Adam and Eve turned their backs to God when they broke the divine commandment by their own free will, and sin overwhelmed their hearts and took control of them. They began to suffer from a void growing within them that the whole world could not satisfy.

The Word of God became flesh to save them and their descendants. He established His kingdom in the hearts of the faithful (Luke 17:21). He built a holy Church in the hearts of the faithful, sending His Holy Spirit to dwell in them (Rom. 8:11). Because of this, the life of spiritual fullness became a reality through the restoration of the image of God and the hope of the promise of heaven (Eph. 1:14), the declaration of the true inner glory, and continual growth day by day. This is what the thief experienced when he heard the divine voice say, “Today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). This fullness is the work of the Holy Trinity that never ceases. Every day, we experience the fatherhood of the Father, our membership in the body of Christ, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit working within us. This uninterrupted fullness is a free gift from God, that prepares us for participation with the heavenly orders in the life of the mystery of thanksgiving and praise.

#### **988. What does the apostle Paul mean by a life of fullness?**

The apostle speaks of the life of fullness often, whether in relation to the Church as a whole, or to each believer as a member of the Church of Christ. He sees the Church that is ascending towards heaven to join the hosts of heavenly orders as a bride bearing the image of her heavenly Groom, who calls her saying, “Behold, you are fair, my love! Behold, you are fair! You have dove’s eyes” (Song 1:15). At the same time, every believer feels that he is the special son or daughter for whom the heavenly Father is preparing a dwelling-place in heaven. “Fullness” in the mind of the apostle Paul means that the believer regains the image of God that was lost and enjoys the righteousness of Christ, so that he becomes a source of admiration for those in heaven and is honored by them. This leads the apostle to fix our gaze on fullness or the enjoyment of the following divine gifts to the believer:

**First:** The gift of being a child of God.

**Second:** The awareness of ascending towards perfection through union with the Savior.

**Third:** The feeling of inner satiety and everlasting joy through experiencing the promise of heaven.

**Fourth:** The burning of the heart with longing for the salvation of all humanity.

**Fifth:** The enjoyment of continuous renewal, rising from glory unto glory.

**Sixth:** The sense of being a stranger on earth — regardless of wealth — so that one sings, “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 22:20).

**Seventh:** The feeling that the Holy Bible is a spiritual garden where the fruit of the Spirit can be gathered from its trees: “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control” (Gal. 5:22–23).

**Eighth:** A heart that never ceases to give thanks and praise God, even when sleeping.

### **989. Why did the Lord Christ not choose Saul of Tarsus to be among His disciples?**

The Lord Christ knew Saul’s heart and thought, his earnestness in studying the law and his striving to attain the righteousness of the law. The apostle Paul said of himself: “concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:6). Out of zeal for the law, he blasphemed Christ in his ignorance and persecuted His disciples and slandered the faithful: “Although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13)

Most of the disciples chosen by the Lord were simple fishermen, as the apostle says: “But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty” (1 Cor. 1:27). He did not choose Saul of Tarsus because Saul was himself experienced in the work of the law, its purpose and potential: “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5–6). When Saul believed in the Lord Christ, he realized the difference between the work of the law and the work of Christ within him, so he said, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Rom. 3:20); and, “What shall we say then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! . . . For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, ‘You shall not covet’” (Rom. 7:7). He realized that the role of the law is to reveal to the believer his need for the divine Savior, and through Him, enter into the life of fullness. “For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes” (Rom. 10:4).

**St. John Chrysostom**<sup>322</sup> says that a man can neither live nor be justified unless he fulfills all requirements and ordinances of the law — which seems impossible! Therefore, if the Jews desire to be justified by the law, the law itself shows them that it is completely incapable of bestowing righteousness and life upon any person. It is this that leads us to faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, who alone did not break the law, and is capable of justifying His believers. Consequently, the apostle Paul does not allow the Jews any excuse, for the law itself declares Christ alone to be the source of all righteousness. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “‘For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness,’ who was prophesied by the law to everyone that believes.”<sup>323</sup>

When the Lord Christ called Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, the apostle felt that his mission was to enjoy a life of fullness in Christ Jesus. The Lord Christ speaks of this fullness in His farewell prayer: “Holy Father, keep through Your name those whom You have given Me, that they may be one as We are” (John 17:11); “That they also may be one in Us” (John 17:21); “That the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them” (John 17:26).

### **990. What is fullness or the life of perfection according to the apostle Paul?**

The apostle discusses fullness in a variety of ways. For instance, he says, “But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Cor. 6:17); “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17); “but of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God— and righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30); “being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil 1:11); “that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4). These echo the words of the gospel: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God” (John 1:12–13).

### **991. How can we, as members of the Church, enjoy fullness or perfection?**

**First:** Fellowship in Christ. **St. Augustine** says, “God is full; every man is empty; if he will be filled, let him come to Him That is full. Come unto Him, and be enlightened [see Ps. 34:5]. Moreover, if a man is empty, in that he is a liar, and he seeks to be filled, and with haste and eagerness runs to the fountain, he wishes to be filled.”<sup>324</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He dwells in those hearts that are faithful, in those that are ‘rooted’ in His love, those that remain firm and unshaken. ‘That you may be’ thoroughly

<sup>322</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 17 (NPNF I/11:471–477).

<sup>323</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.9 (ANF 2:357).

<sup>324</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 83.6 (NPNF I/6:509).

‘strong,’ he says; so that there is great strength needed. ‘That you may be filled unto all the fulness of God.’ What he means is this. Although the love of Christ lies above the reach of all human knowledge, yet you shall know it, if you shall have Christ dwelling in you, yes, not only shall know from Him this, but shall even ‘be filled unto all the fulness of God.’”<sup>325</sup>

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** comments on the passage, “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:9–10), saying, “He supplied then the deficiency, and gave life to mortality, that we may know that from the body in which fulness dwelt, the deficiency of them that lacked was supplied; and from the body in which life dwelt, life was given to mortals.”<sup>326</sup>

**Second:** Accepting the work of the Spirit within us. This means enjoying His power that is at work within the soul. In his book on the Holy Spirit, **St. Basil** speaks of this fullness, saying that the Spirit is given to each person according to the capability of that person. Therefore, the Spirit does not stop giving so long as the person does not stop opening his heart to His work and cooperates with Him.

**Third:** The unity of faith and the knowledge of the Son of God. The apostle says, “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13). After discussing the variety of gifts, the apostle emphasizes that all of them have but a single goal: to bring us to “the unity of the faith.” The apostle avoids confusing the gifts with faith, for the gifts are diverse but the faith is one. Thus, **St. John Chrysostom** says, “That is, until we shall be shown to have all one faith: for this is unity of faith, when we all are one, when we shall all alike acknowledge the common bond. Till then you must labor to this end. If for this you have received a gift, that you might edify others, look well that you do not overturn yourself, by envying another. God has honored you, and ordained you, that you should build up another. Yes, for about this was the Apostle also engaged; and for this was the prophet prophesying and persuading, and the Evangelist preaching the Gospel, and for this was the pastor and teacher; all had undertaken one common work. For do not tell me of the difference of the spiritual gifts; but that all had one work. Now when we shall all believe alike then shall there be unity; for that this is what he calls ‘a perfect man.’”<sup>327</sup>

In this way the variety of gifts are in harmony in the Church — the one body of Christ — in the unity of faith as everyone works together, every person with his own gift. The unity of the Church lies in a diversity of gifts that are one in purpose and faith. This unity advances the faithful from a phase of spiritual childhood to spiritual maturity, as everyone advances together from a spiritual, experiential, and living knowledge to a deeper knowledge, perhaps until they reach the “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

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<sup>325</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 7 (NPNF I/13:81–82) amended.

<sup>326</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Three Homilies* 1.11 (NPNF II/13:310).

<sup>327</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 11 (NPNF I/13:105) amended.



**St. John Chrysostom** says, “By ‘stature’ here he means perfect ‘knowledge’; for as a man will stand firmly, whereas children are carried about and waver in mind, so is it also with believers.”<sup>328</sup>

We are now in the phase of childhood but growing towards full maturity. That is why elsewhere, the apostle calls us “children” (1 Cor. 13:11), and when he compares the spiritual knowledge we now have to that which we shall in future attain, he says, “For we know in part and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor. 13:9–12). Therefore, so long as we continue to strive faithfully, we work together with one purpose in the unity of faith, ever growing from the state of childhood to a state of maturity, that we may attain the “measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.”

## 992. How can the believer experience fullness or perfection?

An individual member cannot be separated from the community, nor the community from the member. All progress in the life of the community collectively edifies each member individually, and all true progress in the life of each member edifies the community. Therefore, when we hear the expression, “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13), we should not understand this as referring only to the Church as a community, or only to the members of the Church individually — it is rather encouragement for the community as a whole and for each individual member to strive to attain this noble and lofty state.

The apostle wants us, out of our own free will, to strive unceasingly with the power of grace on that path. When we hear this, let us not despair, remembering the words of **Abba Serenus**: “Nor should we be drawn away from being intent on this watchfulness through a dangerous despair, for ... ‘the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and the violent take it by force’ (Matt. 11:12), for no virtue is acquired without effort.”<sup>329</sup> In discussing perseverance in striving, **Abba Theonas**<sup>330</sup> explains that God does not force us to climb to the lofty and noble heights of goodness, but through His advice He inspires us to strive to attain perfection by our own free will.

Having filled us with longing to ascend the lofty heavenly mountains to reach “the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ,” the apostle now warns us of the obstacles, urging us to strive unceasingly, like young children who are in need of continuous growth, despite the difficulties that we might face. He says, “that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the

<sup>328</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 11 (NPNF I/13:105).

<sup>329</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 7.6 (NPNF II/11:365).

<sup>330</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 21.5 (NPNF II/11:504–505).

cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Eph. 4:14–15). The Lord Christ works in people who are, in a sense, immature children; He supports them and nurtures them until they become spiritually mature people; and instead of weakness, He grants them strength. In other words, every member in the Church lives in continuous motion without ceasing, moving towards fullness and perfection, growing in love — that is, in Christ who “did not please Himself” (Rom. 15:3), but loved all, sacrificing His life to raise up the Church. St. Paul compares the Church to a ship in the middle of the sea of this world. If all its sailors do not work together in one spirit, they become like children who face many troubles, and who are therefore unable to withstand the wind and the waves, and so perish.

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that the apostle here is speaks of the Church as a single structure: if everyone does not work together in building it, it will collapse and everyone will lose their lives. He comments on this passage saying, “‘That we may be no longer.’— The word, ‘no longer,’ shows that they had of old been in this case, and he reckons himself moreover as a subject for correction, and corrects himself. This is why, he says, there are so many workmen: that the building may not be shaken, may not be carried about, that the stones may be firmly fixed. For this is the character of children, to be tossed to and fro, to be carried about and shaken ... He comes to this figure of speech to point out how great is the peril in which doubting souls are.”<sup>331</sup>

The apostle describes, here, the danger of life without a unity of faith and purpose. He likens the workers to children who are amusing themselves, each in his own world, carried away by the winds of false teachings, falling under people’s deceptions, and deviating into error. He emphasizes the importance of following a path of unity where love binds everyone together under the guidance of the one Head, Christ. He likens the Church to the body, in which the members grow together through their unity in Him and receive their edification through His work within them (Col. 1:18). The whole body grows together without any member losing its own identity, but with every member participating according to its measure: each receives as much growth from the Head as it is able to bear. Thus, **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For the souls of men being dependent upon Him as members, His provident care, and supply of the spiritual gifts according to a due proportion in the measure of every single member, affects their increase ... So that each must not only be united to the body, but also occupy his proper place, since if you shall go beyond this, you are not united to it, neither do you receive the Spirit.”<sup>332</sup>

Through unity of purpose, we are blessed with love that connects us together to the Head, so that He works within us, within each according to their circumstances and as is appropriate to them, for the building up of the whole body. Therefore, we are not merely a community

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<sup>331</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 11 (NPNF I/13:105) amended.

<sup>332</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 11 (NPNF I/13:105).

that works together, but members of one another in which the Head works with love; each according to the gift that His Holy Spirit grants.

**993. What things deprive a person of a life of fullness?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “If therefore we desire to have the benefit of that Spirit which is from the Head, let us cleave one to another. For there are two kinds of separation from the body of the Church; the one, when we wax cold in love, the other, when we dare commit things unworthy of our belonging to that body; for in either way we cut ourselves off from the ‘fullness of Christ.’ But if we are appointed to build up others also, what shall not be done to them who are first to make division? Nothing will so avail to divide the Church as love of power. Nothing so provokes God’s anger as the division of the Church. Yes, though we have achieved ten thousand glorious acts, yet we shall, if we cut to pieces the fullness of the Church, suffer punishment no less sore than they who mangled His body.”<sup>333</sup>

**994. How should those who enjoy a life of fullness deal with those who are weak?**

The apostle says, “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Rom. 15:14). He speaks of the responsibility of those who are strong to bear with the weaknesses of those who are weak, and of Jewish Christians to accept gentiles into the faith with joy and gladness. He chooses to soften his words so that his commandment might not become a heavy burden on their souls. Therefore, he begins by praising them, showing them that what he asks of them is not much given their spiritual level and understanding. His tact in speaking here is noticeable in the following ways:

**First:** He does not say that he *heard* about their goodness, but that he is *certain* of it, and needs no one to witness to them in front of him. In other words, he is saying to them that even if he commands them or strictly rebukes them, he is confident concerning them, that they are full of goodness.

**Second: St. John Chrysostom** comments on his expression, “that you are full of goodness” saying, “It was not as if you were cruel, or haters of your brethren, that I gave you that exhortation, to receive, and not to neglect, and not to destroy ‘the work of God.’ For I am aware that ‘you are full of goodness’; but he seems to me here to be calling their virtue perfect.”<sup>334</sup>

**Third:** In his gentleness, he urges them to enlarge their hearts so as to love others more and more, whereby they will not lack the fullness of goodness, knowledge, and ability. Concerning the heart, they are good, gentle, and loving. Concerning the mind, they have the

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<sup>333</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 11 (NPNF I/13:106).

<sup>334</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 29 (NPNF I/11:542).

fullness of knowledge and understanding. Concerning their potential, they have ability. All these qualities encourage him to demand more and more from them.

**Fourth:** St. Paul writes to them with the spirit of a humble brother, which gives him the boldness to write to them not as someone who gives commands for things that are foreign to their lives, but to remind them to grow more in that which they already practice: “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God” (Rom. 15:15). **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Observe the lowly-mindedness of Paul, observe his wisdom ... And having come down from the seat of the master, both there and here, he speaks to them as brethren and friends of equal rank.”<sup>335</sup>

**Fifth:** The apostle declares that he is obliged to write to them, for he must fulfill the apostolic ministry for which he was chosen as an apostle to the gentiles. So, if Rome is the capital of the gentile world at that time, he feels that it should be the center of his ministry. This is the grace that was granted to him by God, to serve the gentiles; a ministry which he never ceased to practice.

**Sixth:** He says: “being filled with the fruits of righteousness which are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God” (Phil. 1:11). Righteousness is the Lord Christ. The Christian must bring forth fruit in calmness and peace. The fruit of righteousness is good deeds. When we are rooted in the Lord Christ and nourished from Him, we are no longer wild branches, but rather branches of the divine vine, bearing the fruit of the Spirit. We cherish these sublime and satiating fruits; but not with pride or arrogance since they are nothing but a divine gift for the glory of God and His praise. The word “righteousness” here signifies all the works of the Holy Spirit, who grants us the righteousness of Christ and the partaking of the divine nature. [Some old manuscripts] say, “the fruit of righteousness,” not “fruits of righteousness” — the Greek word is singular, not plural. The same word is also found in the singular form in Rom. 6:22, Gal. 5:22, Eph. 5:9, Heb. 12:11, and Jam. 3:18, since, although the fruit of the Spirit comes in diverse forms — such as love, joy, peace, goodness, etc. — all these are in harmony together, as though they were only one fruit.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “And not merely upright, but ‘filled with the fruits of righteousness.’ For there is indeed a righteousness not according to Christ, as, for example, a moral life. [Paul then writes], ‘Which are through Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God.’ Do you see that I speak not of my own glory, but the righteousness of God ... let not your love, he says, indirectly injure you, by hindering your perception of things profitable, and take heed lest you fall through your love to anyone. For I would indeed that your love should be increased, but not so that you should be injured by it.”<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 29 (NPNF I/11:542).

<sup>336</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians* 2 (NPNF I/13:189) amended.

The apostle says, “You are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power” (Col. 2:10). When the incarnation was fulfilled by the union of His divinity with His humanity, the right to experience the richness of Christ was bestowed upon us, through our union with Him, for we become full in Him. Through this fullness, we became able to rise with Him and to sit with Him in the heavenly places (Eph. 2:6), and to reign with Him (2 Tim. 2:12), not lacking anything (Rom. 8:32) for all things have become ours (1 Cor. 3:21).

**St. Augustine** comments on the phrase, “And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16) saying that God granted us a free gift although we deserved a punishment. By this gift, He granted us faith, by which we receive a great reward. This faith leads us to the knowledge of the truth. Through faith, He grants us justification from our sins and grants us the gift of immortality. But all this requires that we guard these gifts.

**St. Hilary of Poitiers** says, “After the announcement that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, follows immediately the mystery of our assumption, in the words, ‘you are complete in Him’ (Col. 2:10) ... we are made full in Him [we partake of fullness] ... for all who are, or shall be, regenerated through the hope of faith to life eternal, abide even now in the body of Christ; and afterwards they shall be made full no longer in Him, but in themselves, at the time of which the Apostle says, ‘Who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory’ (Phil. 3:21). Now, therefore, we are made full in Him, that is, by the assumption of His flesh, for in Him dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. Nor has this our hope a light authority in Him”<sup>337</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “By ‘fullness’ is meant ‘the whole.’ Then the word ‘bodily,’ what did it intend? ‘As in a head.’ But why does he say the same thing over again? ‘And you are made full in Him.’ What then does it mean? That you have nothing less than He. As it dwelt in Him, so also in you.”<sup>338</sup>

The apostle says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Being granted the divine light and true freedom, our nature is renewed and grows every day as we are molded and become an icon of Christ our creator. We are raised from glory to glory. Thus does the believer taste a daily experience and practical knowledge through the power of the Word which is continuously renewed. The Jews were unable to look at the face of Moses, the mediator of the Old Testament, so they had to cover his face with a veil. But for us, we have an unveiled face that we may see, as though in a mirror, how our nature is being molded every day, according to the glorious promise of the gospel of Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of the Lord.”

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “It has been proved that this union of the soul with the incorruptible Deity can be accomplished in no other way but by herself attaining by her virgin

<sup>337</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 9.8 (NPNF II/9:157) amended.

<sup>338</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 6 (NPNF I/13:285) amended.

state to the utmost purity possible — a state which, being like God, will enable her to grasp that to which it is like, while she places herself like a mirror beneath the purity of God, and molds her own beauty at the touch and the sight of the Archetype of all beauty.”<sup>339</sup>

“Let us change in such a way that we may constantly evolve towards what is better, being transformed ‘from glory to glory’ (2 Cor. 3:18), and thus always improving and ever becoming more perfect by daily growth and never arriving at any limit of perfection.”<sup>340</sup>

“We see, then, that the Bride is being led by the Word through the ascents of virtue up to the heights, just as if she were climbing stairs. To this Bride the Word first of all sends in, through the prophetic windows and the law’s lattices, the ray of the commandments and summons her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful once, in the light, she has been given the shape of the dove. Then, when she has shared, as far as is possible for her, in the good things, he draws her toward participation in the transcendent Beauty just as though she had hitherto had no part in them at all. The result is that it seems to her that desire increases in proportion to her progress toward that Light which eternally shines out and at the same time that her ascent is just beginning, on account of the transcendence of the good things, which are always beyond her. That is why he says once again to the awakened soul, *Rise up*, and to the soul that is coming, *Come* [Song 2:10]! For to one who has risen up in this manner there will never be wanting an up-rising without end; nor for one who runs to the Lord will opportunity for the divine race be used up. For it is always necessary to rise up, and it is never right for those who are drawing near by their running to halt. For that reason, as often as he says *Rise up!* and *Come!* He confers the capacity for an ascent toward what is better. This is also the meaning of what comes next in the passage, for he who commands virtue to be born of virtue straight way appends the apostolic counsel by prescribing that the same image ‘be transformed from glory to glory’ (2 Cor. 3:18), meaning that glory is always being received and that what is forever being discovered, no matter how great and exalted it is, is believed to be less than what is hoped for. So it is, then, that the bride is commanded, dove though she was in her former achievements, to become nothing less than a dove again by being transformed for the better; and if this comes to pass, the Word, when next he uses the word *dove*, will again refer to what lies beyond this.”<sup>341</sup>

“And so my discourse has shown that what appears so terrifying (I mean the mutability of our nature) can really be as a pinion in our flight towards higher things, and indeed it would be a hardship if we were not susceptible of the sort of change which is towards the better. One ought not then to be distressed when one considers this tendency in our nature; rather let us change in such a way that we may constantly evolve towards what is better,

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<sup>339</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 11 (NPNF II/5:356).

<sup>340</sup> Jean Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans., S. J. Herbert Musurillo, ed., Herbert Musurillo (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961): p. 84.

<sup>341</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 5: pp. 171–173.

being transformed from glory to glory (2 Cor. 3:18), and thus always improving and ever becoming more perfect by daily growth and never arriving at any limit of perfection.”<sup>342</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Then, that you may not think that he is speaking of a time to come ... Do you see how again he places the Spirit in the rank of God, and raises them up to the rank of the Apostles ... But we all, with unveiled face, reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord ... being cleansed by the Spirit; and not only do we behold the glory of God, but from it also receive a sort of splendor.”<sup>343</sup>

**St Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “I think, that He gradually came to dwell in the Disciples, measuring Himself out to them according to their capacity to receive Him, at the beginning of the Gospel, after the Passion, after the Ascension, making perfect their powers, being breathed upon them, and appearing in fiery tongues.”<sup>344</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “So he not only called the Spirit Lord, but also added: ‘But where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. So we all with unveiled face, reflecting the glory of the Lord, are formed anew into the same image from glory to glory, as from the Lord the Spirit’ (2 Cor. 3:17–18); that is, we who have been before converted to the Lord, so as by spiritual understanding to see the glory of the Lord, as it were, in the mirror of the Scriptures, are now being transformed from that glory which converted us to the Lord, to the heavenly glory.”<sup>345</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “At the same time, not even St. Paul’s expression, ‘face to face’ (1 Cor. 13:12), compels us to believe that we shall see God by means of our physical face, in which we have material eyes, since we shall have an uninterrupted vision of God in our spirit. For, unless there were some spiritual face of the interior man, St. Paul would not have written the words: ‘But we all, with face unveiled, reflecting as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into his very image, from glory to glory, as through the Spirit of the Lord’ (2 Cor. 3:18). So, too, in the psalm, I take the words, ‘Come ye to him and be enlightened; and your faces shall not be confounded’ (Ps. 33:6 LXX), to refer to this inner face. The truth is that we shall draw near to God by faith, which is a power to see which is not in our body, but in our mind.”<sup>346</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> Jean Daniélou, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*, trans., S. J. Herbert Musurillo, ed., Herbert Musurillo (Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1961): p. 84.

<sup>343</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 7.5 (NPNF I/12:313–314).

<sup>344</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* Fifth Theological Oration 26 (NPNF II/7:326).

<sup>345</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.14.102 (NPNF II/10:149).

<sup>346</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 22.29 (FOTC 24:502).

**995. What is the majesty of the ministry of the New Testament and its glory afforded to the faithful?**

**First:** The ministry of the Old Testament was glorious. For example, when Moses the prophet received the tablets of the law on Mount Sinai, but the people feared death, and asked that God would not speak to them, lest they die (Ex. 20:19; Deut. 18:16), so they received the spirit of bondage to fear (Rom. 8:15). But we received the Spirit of power and love (2 Tim. 1:7), the Spirit of adoption by God the Father (Rom. 8:15).

**Second:** The face of Moses, the servant of the law, shone. But the apostles are ministers of the New Testament or the Gospel of Christ which is engraved by the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the faithful that are of flesh, and not of stone (2 Cor. 3:3).

**Third:** Moses offered the letter that kills. But the apostles offer the Gospel of the Spirit who gives life (2 Cor. 3:6).

**Fourth:** Moses received glory, and his face shone, though only for a time. But the glory we receive from Christ grows continuously, and through it we rise from glory to glory until we reach the eternal glories.

**Fifth:** The law was proclaimed through symbols and hidden shadows. But our Gospel became clear and simple.

**Sixth:** The Jews beheld the temporary glory of Moses. But Christians behold the person of Christ living in them. The Jews saw Him on the face of Moses. But we see Him within ourselves, as in a mirror reflecting the brightness of His heavenly glory.

**996. How does God turn all things to the glory of His true believers?**

The apostle Paul teaches us that the believer needs to be aware of God's saving plan in his life when he says, "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

God's plan for us is supreme, for He does not merely change the course of events and circumstances to satisfy our personal desires, but He turns all things, without exception, to the edification of those who are truly faithful, so that even adverse circumstances work for His glory.

**St. John Chrysostom** makes the following comment on the preceding verse: "For he instructs them not to choose just what they may think, themselves, to be useful, but what the Spirit may suggest; for many things that seem to one's self profitable, do sometimes even cause much harm. Quiet, for instance, and freedom from dangers, and living out of fear, seemed to be advantageous for them ... So he that besought the Lord thrice to be freed from hazards ... heard Him say, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect



in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:8–9) ... And he exhorted all men to give up these matters to the Spirit. For the Holy Spirit is very mindful of us, and this is the will of God."<sup>347</sup>

Elsewhere, St. John Chrysostom points out that while all the things that seem painful work for the good of those who love God; for those who do not love Him, even the things that seem good and holy will work against them, if they do not lovingly turn back to Him. Among his illustrations of this principle, he mentions the Jews who not only failed to benefit from the good law, but were even offended by the Lord Christ. He says, "For should even tribulation, or poverty, or imprisonment, or famines, or deaths, or anything else whatsoever come upon us, God is able to change all these things into the opposite ... As then things seemingly harmful do good to these, so do even things profitable harm those who love Him not."<sup>348</sup>

**Abba Theodore** says, "For just as it is said of men who are perfect and wise: 'To them that love God all things work together for good,' so of those who are weak and foolish it is declared that everything is against a foolish man (see Prov. 14:7), for he gets no profit out of prosperity, nor does adversity make him any better ... But a man can be more easily overcome by prosperity than by misfortunes: for these sometimes restrain men against their will and make them humble and through most salutary sorrow cause them to sin less, and make them better: while prosperity puffs up the mind with soothing but most pernicious flatteries."<sup>349</sup>

**St. Jerome**<sup>350</sup> presents Job as a living example of those whose troubles turn to their own good. For the enemy left nothing unharmed in Job except for his tongue, perhaps so that he might blaspheme against God (Job 2:9); yet all this turned out to Job's good, and God came to him and spoke to him as one who speaks to his friend.

**997. What does the apostle mean when he says, "[you] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col. 3:10)?**

Putting on the new man, renewed in knowledge, is a sign of life, for there is no life in Christ without growth, and there is no growth without illumination by the power of the Holy Spirit, so that the inner man can be formed in the image of his Creator and become a living icon of the Lord Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, "This is the word of the mystery whereby through the new birth from above our nature is transformed from the corruptible to the incorruptible, being renewed from the old man (2 Cor. 5:17), according to the image of Him who created at the beginning the likeness to the Godhead."<sup>351</sup>

<sup>347</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 15 (NPNF I/11:453) amended.

<sup>348</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 15 (NPNF I/11:452–453).

<sup>349</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 6.8 (NPNF II/11:365).

<sup>350</sup> See St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 6 (FOTC 48:48–49).

<sup>351</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2.1 (NPNF II/5:101).

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “So then this rational creature upon earth, I mean man, was made from the beginning *after the image of Him that created him* (Col. 3:10), according to the Scriptures; and the meaning of *image* is various. For an *image* may be, not after one sort, but after many; howbeit the element of the likeness to God that made him, which is far the most manifest of all, was his incorruptibility and indestructibility [cf. 1 Cor. 15:54].”<sup>352</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* 9.1 (LFHCC 48:318).

## 9

## Worship and the Fear of the Lord

**998. What are the varieties of fear?**<sup>353</sup>

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** distinguishes the different types of fear experienced by different kinds of people: the fear of servants or slaves; the fear of hirelings; the fear of friends; and the fear of children. He says, “There is one who fears lest he is struck: this is the fear of servants. There is one who fears lest he suffer loss: this is the fear of hired hands. There is one who fears lest he is saddened: this is the fear of friends. There is one who fears lest he be disinherited: this is the fear of sons. While there is [only] one name for fear, many distinctions are found in it. The fear of God was also with the holy prophets, even with the nation of the Jews from time to time, but the forms of fear were distinctive. The prophets, like friends, were afraid lest they might sadden God whom they loved. The Jews, like servants, were afraid of the rod of his discipline.”<sup>354</sup>

Our Christ wants to elevate us through His grace till we attain the fear of sons, when we will not fear God as slaves terrified of their master, executing commands out of the fear of punishment. Neither will we fear God as hirelings, who do what they are commanded that they may receive a wage, or out of fear of being deprived of it. In these cases, God is the *means* and not the *goal*; we are submitting to Him to receive His *blessings* rather than to receive *Him* and delight in His fellowship. Neither do we fear Him as friends who constantly crave their friends’ approval. We fear God as children; we obey His commands so that the image of our Father can be imprinted in our depths, so that we are made ready to partake of His glories, that we may be His and He be ours, and that we may live eternally with Him in His bosom.

**999. Does the fear of the Lord destroy one’s sense of self-esteem?**

The Holy Bible and Church Tradition differentiate between two types of fear: the fear that bears the meaning of reverence and honor; and the fear which bears the spirit of anxiety, weariness, and helplessness. The first type builds our self-esteem, rather than destroying it. And the fear of the Lord is of the first type. It is that kind of fear that characterizes the relationship that heavenly beings have with their Creator. **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “The cherubim bless with melodies of fear while they are terrified, and the seraphim praise saying ‘Holy’ as they tremble ... The cherub does wish to be haughty for he cannot know You (O Lord, in your essence) ... The seraph covers his face with his wings when he sanctifies You,

<sup>353</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty and Jacqueline Samir Kosti, *The Fear of God in St. Philoxenus* (Arabic) (1992).

<sup>354</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 7.4 (195–196): p. 154.

because the living fire frightens him and he cannot look at it. Who is your equal (O Lord)? And who can comprehend You when he praises?”<sup>355</sup>

In another place he says, “Fearful glory and splendor come out of the chariot to gather the heavenly ones around the great glory ... The cherubim rejoice at being those who bear Him, and the seraphim sanctify Him as they gaze upon the city of the Holy One ... All of them cry out because they were deemed worthy of seeing His high place ... By the splendor of His light they all enjoy His blessings.” The words of **St. Jacob of Sarug** are in perfect harmony with **St. John Chrysostom’s** discourse, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*.<sup>356</sup> The fear of God pours heavenly splendor on the heavenly beings, inflames their love for Him, and increases their honor.

What we say about heavenly beings is a lesson for us where we become aware of how fear of the Lord gives us confidence in His work within us. Thus, we cherish encountering Him and desire to meet Him face to face that He may take away all our feelings of weakness, anxiety, or weariness so that we become as those who abide with God in heaven. Then, we will sing with the psalmist saying, “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be held in reverence by all those around Him” (Ps. 89:7); “The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever” (Ps. 19:9). Thus, the fear of God becomes the subject of our praise in eternity, and our pride among the heavenly beings.

### **1000. What effect does the fear of the Lord have on our lives?**

We can learn much from the experiences of the fear of the Lord in the lives of the early Church Fathers.

**First: The fear of the Lord motivates us to take our spirituality seriously. St. John Chrysostom** says, “Such fear had Paul: and therefore he said, I fear ‘lest having preached to others, I myself should be rejected’ (1 Cor. 9:27). For if without the aid of fear temporal things can never be achieved, how much less spiritual matters; for I desire to know, who ever learnt his letters without fear? who has become a proficient in any art, without fear? ... And how may this fear be produced? If we but consider that God is everywhere present, hears all things, sees all things, not only whatsoever is done and said, but also all that is in the heart, and in the depth of the soul, for He is ‘quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart’ (Heb. 4:12), if we so dispose ourselves, we shall not do or say or imagine anything that is evil. Tell me, if you had to stand constantly near the person of a ruler, would not you stand there with fear? And how standing, in God’s presence, do you laugh and throw yourself back, and not conceive fear and dread? Let it never be that you despise His patient endurance, for it is to bring you to repentance that He is longsuffering.”<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 84: On the saying “Do not swear at all” (Matt. 5:34).

<sup>356</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God* (FOTC 72).

<sup>357</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians* 8 (NPNF I/13:219) amended.

**Second: The fear of the Lord offers us a source of joy and eternal happiness. St. John Chrysostom** says, “The fear of God contains both these requisites. It is steadfast and immoveable, and sheds so much gladness that we can admit no sense of other evils. For the man who fears God as he ought, and trusts in Him, gathers from the very root of pleasure, and has possession of the whole fountain of cheerfulness. And as a spark falling upon a wide ocean quickly disappears, so whatever events happen to the man who fears God, these, falling as it were upon an immense ocean of joy, are quenched and destroyed. This indeed is most to be wondered at, that whilst things which minister sadness are present, the man should remain joyful. For if there was nothing to produce grief, it would be no great matter to him that he was able continually to rejoice.”<sup>358</sup>

**Third: Through fear of the Lord, we become aware that God is at work within us. St. John Chrysostom** says, “Fear not because I said, ‘with fear and trembling.’ I said it not with this view, that you should give up in despair, that you should suppose virtue to be somewhat difficult to be attained, but that you might be led to follow after it, and not spend yourself in vain pursuits; if this be the case, God will work all things. Be bold for it is God that works in you. If then He works, it is our part to bring a mind ever resolute, clenched and unrelaxed.”<sup>359</sup>

**Fourth: The fear of the Lord helps us to enjoy God’s goodness and compassion towards us. St. John Chrysostom** says, “For it is with this object that I too discourse so much concerning His goodness, not that we may presume upon it, and do anything we choose, because in that way this goodness will be to the prejudice of our salvation; but that we may not despair in our sins, but may repent. For ‘the goodness of God leads you to repentance’ (Rom. 2:4), not to greater wickedness. And if you become depraved, because of His goodness, you are rather belying Him before men.”<sup>360</sup>

**Fifth: Through fear of the Lord, we take refuge in Him as a solid rock. St. John Chrysostom** says, “Let us imitate these [the Apostles], my beloved: let us be undaunted in all our dangers. There is nothing dreadful to him that fears God; but all that is dreadful is for others. For when a man is delivered from his passions, and regards all present things as a shadow, say, from whom shall he suffer anything dreadful? Whom shall he have to fear? Whom shall he need plead to? Let us flee to this Rock which cannot be shaken ... What is more wonderful to say, the very things which are thought to cause discomfort, became matter of all joy and gladness ... For it is impossible, impossible in words to express how great pleasure falls to their lot, who suffer for Christ’s sake: for they rejoice in their sufferings, rather than in their good things. Whoever loves Christ, knows what I say.”<sup>361</sup>

<sup>358</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 18.6 (NPNF I/9:460).

<sup>359</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Philippians* 8 (NPNF I/13:219–220).

<sup>360</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 4 (NPNF I/13:69) amended.

<sup>361</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 13 (NPNF I/11:84).

**Sixth: Through fear of the Lord, we become enlightened by God and learn virtue from Him.** One of the desert fathers, Abba James, says, “Just as a lamp lights up a dark room, so the fear of God, when it penetrates the heart of a man illuminates him, teaching him all the virtues and commandments of God.”<sup>362</sup> **Evagrius Ponticus** says, “The custodian of these commandments is the fear of God which is in turn the offspring of true faith. Now faith [purely rational, theoretical faith] is an interior good, one which is to be found even in those who do not yet believe in God.”<sup>363</sup>

**Seventh: The fear of the Lord is the steering wheel of the soul,** which the Holy Spirit grants us, who alone is capable of taking us from glory to glory, and to grant grace for grace, through our fellowship with the Lord Jesus, the Holy One. The fear of the Lord takes us onto the royal path, so that we do not deviate towards sin or self-righteousness. It protects us against both the left-hand blow and the right-hand blow<sup>364</sup> until we enter into the bosom of the holy heavenly Father.

**Eighth: The fear of the Lord guides the soul to a safe haven.** **Abba Dorotheos** says, “The fear of God urges the soul to keep commandments and by means of the commandments the house of the soul is built. So let us fear God and build houses for ourselves, to find shelter in winter, in times of rain, lightning and thunder, for a man without a house suffers great hardships in winter.”<sup>365</sup>

**Ninth: Through fear of the Lord, we acquire the love of God.** **St. Ammonas** says, “If any man love the Lord with all his heart and all his soul and with all his might, he will acquire awe, and awe will beget in him weeping, and weeping joy, and joy will beget strength, and in all this the soul will bear fruit. And when God sees its fruit so fair, he will accept it as a sweet savor, and in all things he will rejoice with that soul, with His angels, and will give it a guardian to keep it in all its ways as he prepares it for the place of life, and to prevent Satan from prevailing over it. For whenever the evil one sees this guardian, that is, the power encompassing the soul, he flees, fearing to approach the man, and afraid of the power that is about him. Wherefore, my beloved in our Lord, since I know that you, whom my soul loves, are lovers of God, acquire in yourselves this power that Satan may fear you, and that you may be diligent in all your works. For thus the sweetness of God will provide you with possible strength. For divine sweetness is ‘sweeter than honeycomb’ (Ps. 19:10). Not many monks or virgins have great and divine sweetness since they have not acquired the divine power, except some few here and there. For they were not cultivating the power, and

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<sup>362</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans. Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984): p. 104.

<sup>363</sup> St. Evagrius Ponticus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, trans., John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972) On the Signs of Apatheia 81: p. 36.

<sup>364</sup> Translators’ Note: this denotes spiritual temptations that are obvious and direct (right-hand) or hidden and indirect (left-hand).

<sup>365</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, “Directions on Spiritual Training” in *Early Fathers From the Philokalia*, translated from the Russian text, “Dobrotolubiye,” by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, eighth edition (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981) 91: pp. 172–173.

therefore God did not give it to them. For to those who cultivate it God gives it; for He is no respecter of persons, but gives it to those who cultivate it in every Generation. The effect of this divine power, so long as it resides in a man, is that he despises all dishonor, and all honor from men, hates all the needs of this world, hates all the comforts of the body, cleanses his heart of every foul thought and all the empty wisdom of this world, and makes supplication with fasting and tears night and day. And God, who is good, will not delay to give it to you. Once you have received it you will pass all the time of your life in ease and freedom from care, and you will find great boldness before God, which he will grant you.”<sup>366</sup>

**Tenth: The fear of the Lord lifts us to the way of perfection.** This is the ladder of perfection. The fear of the Lord and His reverence grants us confidence in Him, strength in times of tribulation, and patience to endure the weaknesses of others, so that we may attain the paths of perfection.

### 1001. Does fearing the Lord mean discounting His compassion?

The scribes and the pharisees brought a woman who was caught in adultery to the Lord Christ: “And when they had set her in the midst, they said to Him: ‘Teacher, this woman was caught in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses, in the law, commanded us that such should be stoned. But what do You say?’” (John 8:3–5). His response did not ignore justice but opened a door of compassion before her. Therefore, the fear of the Lord reveals Him to us as both sweetness and truth at the same time.

**St. Augustine** says, “had He said, ‘Let her be stoned,’ He would not appear gentle: let Him say what it became Him to say, both the gentle and the just, ‘Whoever is without sin of you, let him first cast a stone at her.’ This is the voice of Justice: Let her, the sinner, be punished, but not by sinners: let the law be fulfilled, but not by the transgressors of the law ... But He, who had driven back her adversaries with the tongue of justice, raising the eyes of clemency towards her, asked her, ‘Has no man condemned you?’ She answered, ‘No man, Lord.’ And He said, ‘Neither do I condemn you’ ... Let them take heed, then, who love His gentleness in the Lord, and let them fear His truth. For ‘The Lord is sweet and right’ (Ps. 25:8). You love Him in that He is sweet; fear Him in that He is right ... The Lord is gentle, the Lord is long-suffering, the Lord is pitiful; but the Lord is also just, the Lord is also true. He bestows on you space for correction; but you love the delay of judgment more than the amendment of your ways. Have you been a bad man yesterday? Today be a good man. Have you gone on in your wickedness today? At any rate change tomorrow ... How do you know what tomorrow may bring forth? ... God has promised pardon to him that amends, but God has not promised you a long life.”<sup>367</sup>

<sup>366</sup> St. Ammonas, *The Letters of Ammonas: Successor of St. Antony*, trans., Derwas Chitty (SLG Press, 1979): p. 2.

<sup>367</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John 33.5–7* (NPNF I/7:198–199) amended.

**1002. John says, “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18), so why does David the prophet say, “Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints!” (Ps. 34:9)?**

**Abba Dorotheos** says, “St. John says, ‘Perfect love casts out fear’ (1 John 4:18). How is it then that the holy Prophet David says, ‘Fear the Lord, all you his saints’ (Ps. 34:9)? This shows that there are two kinds of fear: the first, initial, the second perfect; one belongs to beginners, the other to perfect saints, who have attained to the measure of perfect love. He who obeys God’s will through fear of torment is still a beginner; and he who fulfils the will of God through love for God in order to please Him, is brought by this love into perfect fear; and through this fear, when once he has tasted the delight of being with God, he is afraid to fall away, is afraid to be deprived of it. It is this perfect fear, born of love, which casts out the initial fear.”<sup>368</sup>

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** talks about fearing the Lord willingly versus being forced to fear the Lord saying, “In the case of Cain, who by his will did not fear God, fear ruled over him by necessity and he was wandering over the earth trembling. Because he had not feared the One who was worthy of fear he was filled with terrors of everything that was visible to him. By the torment of fear itself, he was asking and seeking from God that anyone who would find him should kill him—so that he might escape from a life full of terror and fear.”<sup>369</sup>

**1003. Where does “the fear of the Lord” sit on the ladder of the practical life of faith?**

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** describes the ladder of practical faith for us. He starts with three stages: faith; simplicity; and the fear of God. There is no fellowship with God without faith, and there can be no faith except through the simplicity that God grants the soul to deal with Him as a simple child with her father. This simplicity which begets faith, guards the soul so that it remains steadfast in faith by the grace of God. Through this faith, the soul enjoys the fear of God. She believes in Him, realizes His greatness so that she fears Him, honors Him, and keeps His commandments. So, faith begets the fear of the Lord, so that the believer keeps the commandment and obeys it, fearing punishment. But as he grows in grace, he obeys the commandment as a son who fears only that he might hurt his Father’s feelings.

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “They taught me that the true fear of God is born out of true faith. Whoever believes truly, also truly fears what he believes ... for faith is born out of natural simplicity and moreover is established and guarded by this same simplicity ... For in the same way that simplicity guards faith, the fear of God also guards the commandments of

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<sup>368</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, “Directions on Spiritual Training” in *Early Fathers From the Philokalia*, translated from the Russian text, “Dobrotolubiye,” by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, eighth edition (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981) 22: pp. 158–159 amended.

<sup>369</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.34 (186): p. 147.



God.”<sup>370</sup> He again says, “Now, let us approach the teaching of the concept of the fear of God with a mind that fears God.”<sup>371</sup>

He does not want the “fear” of empty debates and discussions, but the fear of living spiritual experience. Human thought is a gift that God grants to humanity, who need to enter into the realm of the fear of the Lord, which can then lead us as little children under the care of their mothers and fathers — training us, helping us to grow and mature — and journey with us to the knowledge of the mysteries of life.

#### **1004. What are the sources of the fear of God?**

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** positively and wonderfully differentiates between the fear that is begotten purely from the human mind and serves to destroy the soul, and the constructive fear that is a gift from God. Many people try to attain “fear” purely with their human mind, picturing God as mighty and terrifying, who combs humanity for sins by which He can condemn them while He Himself is isolated in His heavens and unfeeling of human weaknesses. But the truly faithful partake of the “fear of the Lord” as a divine gift that rekindles in them a life of repentance with sincere tears; accompanied by the exalted peace of God, complete trust in God the Savior, and a real hope of enjoying His wonders and the promise of His glories.

The first kind of fear is a serious disease that drives the soul to shrink and close in on itself. It must be eradicated since it drives one to remorse that is often accompanied with despair, distress, and unrest. But the fear of the Lord that is a divine gift grants the believer the exalted peace of God along with the sorrow of repentance. It reveals the love of God and thus grants hope. The believer fears God as a judge, so he flees not to another, but to the Judge Himself as his Savior and Redeemer. The believer remains under the providence of the “fear of God” by which he ascends and enters into the exalted mysteries of God, until he climbs Mount Tabor with the three disciples, Peter, James, and John (Matt. 17:1). There, the Lord is transfigured in his heart, and he bows down with them to the ground — not out of shame and despair, but out of the fear that is mingled with the radiance of God’s glory (Matt. 17:6–7). He yearns to never descend from the mountain, but to remain surrounded by this wonderous fear that radiates splendor on the soul as the divine light shines upon it; and he can no longer tolerate being separated from the divine presence. That is why it is necessary to understand the sources of the fear of God, which are as follows:

<sup>370</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.7 (162): p. 129.

<sup>371</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.1 (159): p. 126.

**First: Faith. St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “They taught me that the true fear of God is born out of true faith.”<sup>372</sup> There is a huge difference between one who pushes himself into fear, and the one who asks with faith for God to grant him fear as a free gift. The first says with his tongue that he fears God, without feeling it in the depths of his heart. This fear, which is lifeless, leads a person to be Pharisaic, so that the person lives hypocritically, speaking without attaining. This eventually leads him into recklessness, boredom, or to aversion to spiritual life altogether. But the one who throws open his inner depths by faith to patiently accept the gift of God, his soul shall be possessed of the fear of God and animate all his activities, that he may live with all his being in the joyful fear of God. He fears God with his tongue and his heart equally, with his body and his soul equally.

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “The fear [of God], I say, is not so that one may say with a word, ‘I fear God,’ or as many appear habitually [to be] ones who fear God, but it is the fear stirred up naturally in the soul, and when the soul trembles and quakes within, it stirs with it as well all the members of the body.”<sup>373</sup>

**Second: Contemplation of God and remembering Him. St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “Because as long as a thought is not retained in a worthwhile conception, it wanders outside of itself and goes back and forth in a place beyond the help of God. Just as when [a thought] reflects on virtues it resides in the light of the recollection of God, so when it leads and applies itself to empty and unprofitable thoughts, all its way is in darkness. Whoever lives in darkness does not see nor is seen. He neither discerns nor is discernable. He neither knows nor is he knowable, but is deprived of the beauty of the vision of creatures, and all those who see are also deprived of the sight of him. He neither discerns the road nor does he recognize the path and does not see the trace of his steps.”<sup>374</sup> And, “just as when one opens his eyes light shines into the pupils, so through the remembrance of God the fear of God shines at once into the mind.”<sup>375</sup>

The fear that accompanies enjoying the divine presence and the constant remembrance of God transports the believer from darkness to the divine light and grants him a sort of illumination. He sees God present in everything in his life and sees everything that He has made as beautiful and enjoyable. He distinguishes God’s will from every contrary will. He knows the mysteries of God and delights in the wondrous works of God. By remembering God, the believer enjoys the fear of the Lord, and so becomes visible, distinguished, and known. Whoever remembers God, God will remember him, and whoever fears God, God will grant him fear, honor, and appreciation in the eyes of the heavenly and the earthly, and

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<sup>372</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.7 (162): p. 129.

<sup>373</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.8 (162): p. 129.

<sup>374</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.2 (159–160): p. 127.

<sup>375</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.22 (174): p. 138.

even in the eyes of all creation. The fear of the Lord bestows upon the believer special appreciation and grace. Fear God as is fitting, and you will be feared. The author of the Clementines mentions this in his discourse on Satan and his soldiers saying, “The smallest Christian (who fears God) is stronger than the greatest devil.”

**Third: Focusing on the word of God. St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** sees the word of God as a living source of fear of God, instructing us not to repeat it with our tongues only, but to live it in our hearts, so that divine springs that irrigate the soul can erupt within us and transform the dry desert of the soul into a fruitful garden. He says, “In order that it may not happen to us in this way, let us be occupied at all times with the word of God, not only when the tongue sets it in motion by repetition, but also when the heart reflects and studies it thoughtfully, the aim being that our mouth may speak at all times from the abundances of our heart.”<sup>376</sup> When the soul is granted the fear of the Lord as a divine gift, it delights in it and the effective word of God burns like a flame from it continually. The fear of the Lord becomes the law of the soul, its natural spiritual law. This is different from bodily fear.

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “Because just as the fear of the body is of external injuries, or of beasts or of fire, or of swords or of hot irons, or of drowning or of a fall from steep precipices, or a report of robbers or the sight of judges, or painful tortures, or bindings and prisons, so also the fear of the soul is naturally of the hidden judge who is able to punish it along with its body through spiritual afflictions according to its nature. Just as the body naturally fears all these things we have considered, so also the soul naturally fears the memory of the judgment of God ... When the body sees things that harm it, it is fearful of them; when the soul observes these things that punish it, it is terrified of them. Not by [any other] means is the body stirred up by these things harmful to it, but as soon as it sees them or reflects on their memory, it is stirred up and is naturally fearful of them. In this same way, when the soul has looked with the eye of faith on future menaces and has seen secretly the fearful things the word of the judge has revealed, immediately it is filled with fear, and all its thoughts—its spiritual members—shake.”<sup>377</sup>

### 1005. Is the fear of the Lord natural for the soul?

The soul that bears the image of her Creator — the image created in her by God — fears no one other than Him. The world, with all its troubles, threats, and events can never find its way into the soul, nor shake her, unless she allows it to enter by submitting herself to its enslavement. Only then can fear become part of her nature.

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “The soul does not fear a vision of bodily injuries, even if it seems that it fears because of its involvement with [its body]. When the soul fears these

<sup>376</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.3–4 (160): pp. 127–128.

<sup>377</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.8 (163): pp. 129–130.

things, its fear is outside of its nature, that is, the fumes of the body's fear have ascended over it and have darkened its intelligence, and it has become fearful along with the body of those things that do not harm it.”<sup>378</sup>

It is clear that **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** distinguishes the human body from the human soul. However, he does not embrace dualism, but rather professes the unity of the human being or human nature. The body has its own characteristics, which include fear of material and temporal things; and the soul has its own characteristics, which are the fear of the Lord, who alone is able to enter and dwell in her. If a person gives his body the right to lead, he subjects the soul to the desires and weaknesses of the body, such as fear of temporal things, which is foreign to the nature of the soul. But if his soul submits to the Spirit of the Lord, and his soul leads his body, the body will be sanctified, and it will not be terrified even of death, which is foreign to its nature. In other words, either a person lives according to the flesh and enslaves his soul to the weaknesses of his flesh, so that he becomes completely weak as if he were nothing but a weak body; or he lives according to the spirit by the Spirit of God and becomes completely under the power of the Spirit.

#### **1006. How can the fear of God bring about spiritual growth?**

When the soul clings to God and knows Him, the natural result is that she delights in fearing Him, which is the natural law by which she lives. The soul's knowledge of God and her contact with Him proceeds according to her spiritual level.

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “According to how one views himself, so he [views] the memory of God. If he lives on the level of offenders, God will be visible to him as a judge. But if he has ascended to the other degree of penitents, [God] will show himself before him as one who forgives. Moreover, if he lives in a merciful fashion, he will discover the wealth of God's mercy, and if he is clothed with humility and gentleness, God's sweetness is visible before him. And if he possesses a knowledgeable mind, he will observe the wealth beyond comprehension of the wisdom of God. If he casts away anger and is free from wrath, peace and quiet moving in him at all times, he will be elevated to see the imperturbable serenity of God. If the movements of faith are continually stirring in his soul, he will observe at all times the incomprehensibility of the works of God and will affirm even those things which appear to be explicable but that [in fact] are beyond knowledge. But if a human being exists on the higher level of spiritual love, according to the level on which he stands it will be evident to him that God is entirely love. This is remarkable, that while God is simple in his nature and there are no members or parts in him, he shows himself in many forms to everyone. [God] is visible to anyone who seeks [him] in any aspect one prefers ... Do not imagine that you will see God as the Good while you are living in an evil manner ... [Only]

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<sup>378</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.14 (168): p. 133.

once you become like him in every one of the virtues he has commanded you to keep will he become visible to you as he is.”<sup>379</sup>

Fear is the beginning of the journey, supporting a person until he reaches full maturity and is perfected in love. **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “Just as fear accompanies natural childhood and urges it concerning all the teachings and incites it to accept [education in] writing and learning, so also the fear of God is attached to the infancy of the soul and urges it to guard the commandments and to fulfill the laws, and not to despise and disdain those things delivered to it by the word of God.”<sup>380</sup>

The true fear of the Lord is the faithful’s helper at the beginning of their journey as spiritual children, and it was also the instructor of the ancient people of Israel when they were like children, as **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “It was too much for [Israel] to love his God, and because of this [Moses] was urging [Israel] to fear his God. ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind’ (Deut. 6:5). This was the commandment of the righteous among them. But to those who became like servants and were committing faults at all times like servants he had commanded, ‘Fear your God.’ Fear holds back vices and love fulfills virtues. Fear cuts off the course of those who are iniquitous and love stimulates the journey of virtues. ‘Fear your God and love the Lord your God’—both of these [commandments] were placed in the law that was given to the people in order that whoever rises above the commandment of fear may find before him the commandment of love which is more perfect than it. On account of this Paul, while he was showing the distinction between us and them, said regarding the discipline of Christ, ‘You have not received the spirit of servitude for the sake of fear’ (Rom. 8:15). That is, you were not called to become servants in order that fear will be born to you from servitude, but ‘you were invited for the adoption of sons’ (Rom. 8:15), which in love all good things are perfected.”<sup>381</sup>

Fear supports the believer in his struggle against evil, especially in his resistance to evil thoughts. **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “The fear of God is a bridle that alters the impetuosity of a person from wandering after evil things and holds him back from running after contemptible lusts, not only for one’s public life but especially for one’s interior life.”<sup>382</sup>

“For see, a person who lives in this memory at all times, if even a simple movement of desire should fly over his soul, at once he is full of fear. He is shaken and astonished concerning that thought of desire which has occurred in him. It flees at once and this thought

<sup>379</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.17–18 (170–172): pp. 135–136.

<sup>380</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 7.3 (194): pp. 153–154.

<sup>381</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 7.8 (198–199): p. 157.

<sup>382</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.29 (181): p. 143.

of evil things vanishes before the fear of the soul, like a bird that flies away in front of someone who suddenly has startled its rest. The fear and reverence of people guard the body from lusts, but the fear and shame that a person has before God guard the movements of the soul from thoughts of evil things. Because he sees that God is watching him at all times, he continually scrutinizes himself lest he sin and guards his hidden person from hidden flaws that the hidden eye of God perceives.”<sup>383</sup>

### **1007. Does the fear of God protect us from evil thoughts?**

Whoever meditates on God is shielded from thinking evil, for “What communion has light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “Therefore, surround yourself with a wall, O discerning one, of the fear of God, and evil things will not dare to enter into the city of your soul. Give reverence to God secretly and see, your soul has been guarded in its purity. Stir the fear of [God] in yourself at all times, and see, you have been preserved from the sins of thoughts. May his constant memory dwell in you, and the memory of vices will not reside with it. As long as you are mindful of God, you will not be able to be mindful of vices, because light and darkness do not reside in the eye together, and the memory of God and the memory of vices do not coincide in the soul ... The memory of vices is error, and the memory of God is true knowledge. Error is darkness, but knowledge is light.”<sup>384</sup>

### **1008. What is the measure of my fear of the Lord?**

Only the depths of a person’s own soul can measure the state of his own inner soul. **St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “The experience of the fear of God, therefore, is with the soul, and only a human being is able to know whether or not he fears God ... If you have remembered God and have trembled, and [if] you have brought him to mind and immediately you have been filled with fear, and [if] your thoughts have shuddered with your members and your soul has trembled with your body, and [if] your mind has bowed down its head and your intellect has become secretly modest before God—if these things are happening to you, know that the fear of God is in you and the memory of the Lord is truly near to you.”<sup>385</sup>

The other measure of our souls that gauges one’s degree of the fear of the Lord and constant remembrance of Him that St. Philoxenus puts forward is whether we exhibit hypocrisy or not. He gives many examples of this, such as: putting on the garment of purity on the outside while the garment of lust and adultery clothes the inside; fasting externally while craving the pleasures of food internally; practicing gentleness and meekness externally

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<sup>383</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.23 (175–176): p. 139.

<sup>384</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.24 (176): p. 139.

<sup>385</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6:26 (177–178): pp. 140–141.

while one's temper is violent internally; or attending church prayer meetings without praying hidden prayers in one's chamber.<sup>386</sup>

### 1009. What is the extent of the fear of God?

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** often focuses on the internal dimension of our fear of the Lord, saying, “In this way only may the spiritual soldier fear God, not like servants fearing [their] lords or subjects [fearing their] kings and judges. Fear puts on those outer demeanors and is visible on the outside on the members of the body, and when it happens that they hate them inwardly and despise them with their thoughts, they are showing them on the outside a garment of fear. May your own fear of God not be like this, but from wherever [God] is observing, from there show this fear. Wherever [God] sees secretly the movements of your soul, may the power of his fear take hold of you. Fear God absolutely, fully, in your interior [person] and in your exterior [person], for he is the judge of your secret and public actions. May your soul be ashamed before him and not sin, and may your thought be modest and not commit iniquity ... But you should remember at all times that God is watching you, and you should observe him also secretly—That One who sees you secretly—and sin will not remain in your thoughts ... But when you are alone by yourself, and the walls of the house and the roof shelter you on all sides, here the armor of the fear of God is necessary for you, because in darkness sin is easily accomplished. Here you ought to alert your soul to the memory of God.”<sup>387</sup>

### 1010. Is fear the first step towards heaven?

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** believes that our early Fathers who followed the path of Christ's teachings set down for us “sign-posts and milestones which are set by the side of a natural road so that no man may venture to stray to the right hand or to the left.” This royal road is the road of the divine commandment.<sup>388</sup> This same path is the ladder that Jacob saw extending from earth to heaven, and angels ascending and descending on it (Gen. 28:12). It is the ladder on which humans who are ascending encounter the angels descending. The faithful climb it as heavenly soldiers, changing their names from “humans” to “angels,” just as soldiers used to change their names when they joined the army in the past — we also join the army of the spiritual. On this ladder, believers meet angels in the circle of love, and those who are spiritual meet those who are carnal, since both parties must strive, by the grace of God, to keep the divine commandment. On this ladder, God's will is fulfilled. Through the

<sup>386</sup> See St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6.27 (178–179): pp. 141–142.

<sup>387</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 6:30–31 (181–183): pp. 143–145.

<sup>388</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 7.1 (191): pp. 151–152.

divine commandment, humans ascend by God’s grace, on the steps of the ladder to live in the spirit of love with the heavenly beings. And through the divine commandment, angels come down to serve humans (Heb. 1:14).

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “As for those who are lower and physical in their nature, the performance of the commandments has made them higher and spiritual. And as for those who are higher and spiritual in their creation, the Maker’s commandment urges them to descend to the place of those lower and be continually with those physical. Just as a single church is gathered from races different from one another in a concord of love that sings the [thrice] holy of the will of God and is moved completely by a single living and spiritual movement, [in the same way] the natural body is moved entirely by the life of the soul.”<sup>389</sup>

### **1011. How can we counter fear?**

In speaking of Jacob’s ladder — through which Jacob enjoyed the open heavens and fellowship with heavenly beings — we must not forget that Jacob suffered from fear. He was utterly isolated; there was no father, mother, brother, or friend to accompany him or support him. On his way, fleeing his brother’s violence, he was in great danger, looking forward to an uncertain future. Jacob lay his head on the stone, a symbol of the Lord Christ, to sleep and he was granted a heavenly vision. He was gripped by the fear of God and said, “How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!” (Gen. 28:17).

When we suffer from bodily fear or worldly fear which destroy the soul, we lean on Christ our cornerstone, who replaces our destructive fear with holy fear. Instead of our fear of the world with all its harsh circumstances, we see God’s glory, holiness, and love, so we carry ourselves reverently and realize that we abide in the house of God and have become “members of the household of God” (Eph. 2:19). Just as we resist an evil passion with a holy passion, so we also resist deadly fear with holy fear.

### **1012. Who is able to cast fear away from us?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Why then are you afraid, O Christians? Christ speaks: ‘It is I. Do not be afraid.’ Why are you alarmed at these things? Why are you afraid? I have foretold these things that they must necessarily be done. “‘It is I, do not be afraid.’ Then they willingly received Him into the boat.’ Recognizing Him and rejoicing, they are freed from their fears. And immediately the boat was at the land to which they went. There is an end made at

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<sup>389</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 7.2 (193): p. 153.



the land; from the watery to the solid, from the agitated to the firm, from the way to the goal.”<sup>390</sup>

He again says, “He introduces the name of friend in such a way as to withdraw that of servant; not as if to include both in the one term, but in order that the one should succeed to the place vacated by the other ... For just as there are two kinds of fear, which produce two classes of fearers; so there are two kinds of service, which produce two classes of servants. There is a fear, which perfect love casts out (1 John 4:18); and there is another fear, which is clean, and endures forever. The fear that lies not in love, the Apostle pointed to when he said ‘for you have not received the spirit of service again to fear’ (Rom. 8:15). But he referred to the clean fear when he said, ‘be not high-minded, but fear’ (Rom. 11:20). In that fear which love casts out, there has also to be cast out the service along with it: for both were joined together by the Apostle, that is, the service and the fear, when he said, ‘for you have not received the spirit of service again to fear.’ And it was the servant connected with this kind of service that the Lord also had in His eye when He said, ‘Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knows not what his lord does.’ Certainly not the servant characterized by the clean fear, to whom it is said, ‘Well done, good servant: enter into the joy of your lord’; but the servant who is characterized by the fear which love casts out, of whom He elsewhere says, ‘The servant abides not in the house for ever, but the Son abides ever’ (John 8:35). Since, therefore, He has given us power to become the sons of God, let us not be servants, but sons: that, in some wonderful and indescribable but real way, we may as servants have the power not to be servants.”<sup>391</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “Christ then is the deliverance from all danger and the accomplishment of achievements beyond hope for those who receive him ... His disciples alone and by themselves, a type of Ecclesiastical teachers in succession throughout all time, swim through the billows of this present life as a kind of sea, meeting with varied and great temptations, and enduring no contemptible dangers of teaching at the hands of those who oppose the faith and war against the Gospel preaching: but they shall be freed both from their fear and every danger, and shall rest from their toils and misery, when Christ shall appear to them hereafter too in God-befitting Power, and having the whole world under His Feet. For this I deem His walking on the sea signifies, since the sea is often taken as a type of the world by Divine Scripture, as it is said in the Psalms, *This great and wide sea, there are things creeping innumerable, both small and great beasts* (Ps. 104:25). When Christ then comes in *the glory of His Father* (Matt. 16:27), as it is written, then shall the ship of the holy Apostles, that is, the Church, and they that sail therein, i.e., they who through faith and love toward God are above the things of the world, without delay and without all toil, gain the land,

<sup>390</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 25.7 (NPNF I/7:163) amended.

<sup>391</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 85.2–3 (NPNF I/7:351–352) amended.

whither they were going. For it was their aim to attain unto the Kingdom of Heaven, as to a fair haven.”<sup>392</sup>

He also says, “Being His friends, we ought not to fear death, but rather imitate the faith of the holy fathers. The patriarch Abraham, when tempted, offered his only-begotten son Isaac, ‘accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead’ (Heb. 11:19). What terror of death, therefore, can assail us, now that ‘Life has abolished death?’ (2 Tim. 1:10) for Christ is ‘the Resurrection and the Life’ (John 11:25). And this too we must bear in mind, that the crowns are to be won by labour. It is strong exertion united with skill that perfects those mighty athletes in the games. It is courage and a brave mind that are most serviceable to those who are skilled in battles: while the man who throws away his shield is ridiculed even by the foe: and if the runaway live, he leads a life of disgrace. But he who was steadfast in the battle, and stood stoutly and courageously with all his might against the enemy, is honoured if he win the victory; and if he fall, is looked upon with admiration.”<sup>393</sup>

“The Pharisees, however, imagined that the power of Herod would terrify Him, and humble Him unto mean fears, although He is Lord of powers, and begets in us spiritual bravery by His words, ‘Fear not them who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul’ (Matt. 10:28). And that He too makes no account of the violence of men He showed, saying, ‘But I must walk today and tomorrow and the day after’ [Luke 13:33]. And in saying, ‘I must,’ He does not imply that an inevitable necessity, so to speak, was laid upon Him, but rather that by the power of His own will, freely and without danger He would go wherever He chose, and traverse Judaea without any one opposing Him or plotting Him ill, until of His own accord He received His consummation upon the precious cross ... Of His own will He consented to suffer, as being well assured that by the death of His flesh He would abolish death, and return again to life. For He arose from the dead, having raised up with Him the whole nature of man, and having fashioned it anew unto the life incorruptible.”<sup>394</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “He therefore adds that the thing we should really dread is the soul’s punishment, and that we need not fear the sufferings of the body. Death is not a punishment, it is merely an end to our natural life. Consequently, death puts an end to the [temporal] suffering of the body; the punishment of our souls endures forever. Therefore one should fear God alone.”<sup>395</sup> He allows temptation, urging us not to worry or be troubled about how we act or what to say, since His Holy Spirit is the One who works in the afflicted, proclaiming the glory of Christ, witnessing His splendor in us, preaching and testifying of Him for others.

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<sup>392</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. 1* 3.4 (LFHCC 43:339–340) amended.

<sup>393</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke, Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 87: p. 400, amended.

<sup>394</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke, Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 100: pp. 468–469, amended.

<sup>395</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 7.110: p. 224.

**St. Augustine** says, “He liberates you from fear and grants you love, which kindles your zeal to preach about Me, so that the scent of My glory may proceed from you to the world.”<sup>396</sup>

**St. Jerome** talks about God’s work in these difficult moments, saying, “You see, we do not have store- houses all stocked up, but our plenty abounds at that moment.”<sup>397</sup>

**St. John of Dalyatha** says, “If you are a stranger to every external disturbance, you will hear within you the Spirit uttering glorious things,”<sup>398</sup> and “If your soul is Jerusalem lauding Christ, why are the sons of Babylon [the confused] wandering in its streets?”<sup>399</sup>

**1013. What is the difference between the fear that love casts out, and the pure fear that endures forever?**

**St. Augustine** says, “One cannot better explain the difference between the two fears, the one which love casts out, the other chaste, which endures forever, than by putting the case of two married women, one of whom, you may suppose, is willing to commit adultery, delights in wickedness, only fears lest she be condemned by her husband. She fears her husband: but because she yet loves wickedness, that is the reason why she fears her husband. To this woman, the presence of her husband is not grateful but burdensome; and if it chance she live wickedly, she fears her husband, lest he should come. Such are they that fear the coming of the day of judgment. Put the case that the other loves her husband, that she feels that she owes him chaste embraces, that she stains herself with no uncleanness of adultery; she wishes for the presence of her husband. And how are these two fears distinguished? The one woman fears, the other also fears ... The one says, I fear my husband, lest he should come: the other says, I fear my husband, lest he depart from me. The one says, I fear to be condemned: the other, I fear to be forsaken ... But to the loving soul the time moves slowly. Hear her singing, like a lily as she is from amid the thorns; hear her sighing and saying, ‘I will sing, and will understand in a faultless way: when will thou come unto me?’ (Ps. 101:1–2) But in a faultless way well may she not fear; because ‘perfect love casts out fear’ [1 John 4:18]. And when He is come to her embrace, still she fears, but in the manner of one that feels secure. What does she fear? She will beware and take heed to herself against her own iniquity, that she sin not again: not lest she be cast into the fire, but lest she be forsaken by Him.”<sup>400</sup>

**St. Macarius the Great** says, “I assure you that even the apostles, though they had the Comforter, were not entirely without anxiety. With joy and gladness, they had fear and

<sup>396</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *In Matt hom.* 33:6.

<sup>397</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 54 (FOTC 48:387).

<sup>398</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *Homily 2*. Cf. *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 15.2: p. 72.

<sup>399</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 39.3: p. 164.

<sup>400</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Ten Homilies on the First Epistle of St. John* 9.6, 8 (NPNF I/7:516–517).

trembling, proceeding from grace itself, not from the side of evil; but the same grace secured them, that they might not swerve, though it were but a little.”<sup>401</sup>

And **Maximos the Confessor** says, “Fear of hell causes beginners to shun evil. Desire to be rewarded with divine blessings confers on those who are advancing a readiness to practice the virtues. But the mystery of love transcends all created beings and makes the intellect blind to all that is sequent to God.”<sup>402</sup>

And in the Paradise of the Fathers, we read: “A brother once asked an elder: ‘How can the soul acquire the fear of God?’ He replied, ‘If the soul does not see God, it does not fear Him.’ He said to him, ‘And how is God revealed to the soul?’ He replied, ‘With solitude and distress, and its continual weeping with unwavering longing, saying: “O my Lord Jesus Christ.” If His remembrance is always in your heart, then He comes and dwells in you and teaches you all good deeds.’”<sup>403</sup>

#### **1014. How can we not be afraid of the devil?**

In the **Shepherd of Hermas** we read, “‘Fear,’ said he, ‘the Lord, and keep His commandments. For if you keep the commandments of God, you will be powerful in every action, and every one of your actions will be incomparable ... But fear not the devil; for, fearing the Lord, you will have dominion over the devil, for there is no power in him.’”<sup>404</sup> The faithful who fear the Lord have no fear of the devil, but rather, demons fear the people of God.<sup>405</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** believed that our motivations — whatever their nature — are good gifts given to us by God. Anger is a great gift given to us, without which we can neither offer repentance, nor wage war on the devil and fight against sin. He says, “Anger is implanted in us as a sort of sting, to make us gnash with our teeth against the devil, to make us vehement against him, not to set us in array against each other. We have arms, not to make us at war among ourselves, but that we may employ our whole armor against the enemy. Are you prone to anger? Be so against your own sins: chastise your soul, scourge your conscience, be a severe judge, and merciless in your sentence against your own sins.”<sup>406</sup> And, “I assure you, and I repeat with the loudest voice, telling you about the refuge of soaring heights: that a

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<sup>401</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 17.7: p. 145.

<sup>402</sup> Maximos the Confessor, “Two Hundred Texts on Theology: For Thalassios,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume II*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981) Second Century 9: p. 139.

<sup>403</sup> See *The Paradise of the Fathers: Expanded Edition*, (Arabic), Monastery of St. Macarius the Great.

<sup>404</sup> Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas), *Commandments 7* (ANF 2:24).

<sup>405</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Devil and Our Victory Over Him* (Arabic), (2005), Chapter 3.

<sup>406</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians 2* (NPNF I/13:58).

Christian ought not to fear any of the inhabitants of the earth ... nor Satan, the devil and tyrant ... as long as the person does not harm himself first.”

And **St. Didymus the Blind** says, “If powers, forces, rulers of the world of darkness and evil spirits tempt us, we are not supposed to take issue with them or make peace with them, but we must fight them. But when we have subdued them and are given power ‘to tread on snakes and scorpions’ (Luke 10:19), then it is a time for peace. Thus, first the devil has to be crushed under the feet of the saints. When it is time for war, one has to tread on ‘all the power of the enemy.’ But when we have broken them down, we can live in enduring peace, our thinking is free from confusion, and we have a time for peace.”<sup>407</sup>

**Evagrius Ponticus** says, “Anger is given to us so that we might fight against the demons and strive against every pleasure.”<sup>408</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “The devil and his angels are the enemies against whom we pray. They envy us the kingdom of heaven, they want us not to go up to the place from which they were expelled. Let us pray against these in order that our souls may be saved.”<sup>409</sup>

The **Spiritual Elder (John of Dalyatha)** says, “As a wolf fears encountering a brave knight, so do the demons fear the one who see what is hidden, and plot strategies for those who fall into their hands to stop them from fleeing to the One who sees what is hidden. For upon those who are obedient to them, they [demons] a cast fear of encountering a man of God. At times, they cast a shyness within them, using every means to keep them away from him, lest they find favor with him and he save them from their hands.”<sup>410</sup>

And in his hymn on the relocation of the relics of the apostle Thomas, **St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “The Evil One wailed ‘Where now, is there a place for me to flee to from the righteous?’”<sup>411</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 3.8; 81:21 (ACCOS 9:227).

<sup>408</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, trans., John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972) 24: p. 23.

<sup>409</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Psalm 30*.

<sup>410</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *Memre on the Gift of the Spirit to Those Who Experience Ecstasy*.

<sup>411</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *The Nisibene Hymns* 42.1 (NPNF II/13:205).



## 10 Holy Fasting

### 1015. Why does the believer need to fast?

God — who created everything for the humans that He might make of them living kings queens — gave the humans one commandment: not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He did not do so to deprive them of anything but wanted them to stretch out their hands and eat from the tree of life, and so to live, through obedience, in a blissful eternity, like the holy angels. Moreover, Adam and Eve could have resisted Satan and all his soldiers through obedience to the divine commandment, and thereby declare through their fasting that their love for God transcends everything. The Lord planted for them the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8) to make of their hearts an exalted paradise.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Fasting began in Paradise when God said to Adam: ‘Do not eat from the tree of knowledge of the good and evil.’ Our first parents were driven out of Paradise for lack of fasting. Therefore, fasting is the way to enter the kingdom. Do not tremble or be afraid of fasting. Does your body not need medicine? Likewise, your soul also often needs medicine. Fasting is the medicine of the soul, to rid it of sin.”<sup>412</sup>

Also, in the Old Testament deuterocanonical Book of Judith, the leaders and people trusted that the Lord would heed their prayers when they were steadfast in fasting and prayers in the sight of the Lord (Judith 4:8–15).

### 1016. What do the Church Fathers say about fasting?

**St. Basil the Great** says, “[Fasting] is a good guardian of the soul, a safe companion for the body, the best weapon, a training regimen for contestants. It drives away temptations. It readies for piety. It is the companion of sobriety and the craftsman of self-control. In war it teaches bravery, in peace stillness. It sanctifies the Nazirite [monk] and perfects the priest. For it is impossible to venture upon priestly activities without fasting, not only in the case of our present holy and true worship, but also in the prefigured worship set out in the law.”<sup>413</sup>

“Fasting is likeness to the angels, companionship with the righteous, moderation in life. It made Moses the lawgiver. Samuel is the fruit of fasting. Hannah as she fasted vowed to God: *O Lord God of Sabaoth, if you were to look upon your maidservant and give me a male child, then I will offer him in your presence as a gift. He shall drink no wine or strong drink until the day of his death* (1 Sam. 1:11 LXX). The great Samson was reared on fasting, and as long as it was part of that man’s life, his enemies fell by the thousands (Judg. 15:16), the

<sup>412</sup> See Elias Koyter al-Mukhlessy, *St. Basil the Great* (Arabic) (Publications of the Pauline Library in Beirut, 1989): p. 288.

<sup>413</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.6 (PP 50:61).

gates of the city were pulled down (Judg. 16:3), and lions did not withstand the strength of his hands (Judg. 14:6). But when drunkenness and fornication seized him, he was easily captured by his enemies. And after he was deprived of his eyes, he was set out as a plaything for little Philistine boys. After Elijah fasted, he shut up heaven for three years and six months (1 Kings 17:1). For when he saw that such great arrogance had been born of self-indulgence, he deemed it necessary to subject them to involuntary fasting with a famine, forcing an end to their sin, which had already increased beyond measure. It was fasting that, like a kind of cauterization or amputation, halted the rampant spread of vice.”<sup>414</sup>

“Daniel, *the man of desires* (Dan. 10:11), neither ate bread nor drank water for three weeks (see Dan. 10:2–3). And he taught the lions to fast when he climbed down into their den (cf. Dan. 6:17–25). For just as lions cannot sink their teeth into anything constructed of stone or metal or any other solid material, so too fasting, by hardening the body of that man as tempering hardens iron, made it as steel to the lions. For they did not open their mouth against the saint. Fasting quenched the power of fire and kept away the mouths of the lions.”<sup>415</sup>

#### **1017. What did the desire for food do to the people of God?**

**St. Basil** says, “*Whose bodies fell in the wilderness?* (Heb. 3:17; cf. Num. 14:29, 32–33). Was it not those who desired to eat meat [Num. 11:33]? As long as they were content with manna and water from the rock, they conquered the Egyptians, and they travelled through the sea. *In their tribes were none who fell behind* (Ps. 105:37). But when they remembered the fleshpots and returned to Egypt in their hearts (see Ex. 16:3), they did not see the promised land.”<sup>416</sup>

#### **1018. Why did our Lord Jesus choose Moses and Elijah to behold Him and speak with Him at His transfiguration?**

Our Lord Jesus was transfigured in the presence of Moses and Elijah, who both fasted for forty days. Thus does the Lord call us to partake with them of their fast, that our fasts may be sanctified by His divine fast, and that the Lord of Glory may be transfigured within our hearts as on Mount Tabor, and so His Kingdom may be established within us, according to His divine promise: “the Kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). We fast that we may be immersed in the vision of God and communion with Him, saying, “See, we have left all and followed You” (Luke 18:28). On Mount Tabor St. Peter said, “Lord, it is good for us to be here” (Matt. 17:4). Truly, poor is the one who fasts and is not concerned with seeing God and conversing with Him, for this person suffers from hunger of both body and spirit.

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<sup>414</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 2.6 (PP 50:78–79).

<sup>415</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.7 (PP 50:63).

<sup>416</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.9 (PP 50:67–68).



**St. Basil the Great** says, “By fasting, Elijah became a spectator of a great spectacle [wonder]. For after he purified his soul through a forty-day fast, he was deemed worthy of seeing the Lord in the cave on Horeb, insofar as it is possible for a human being to see the Lord (see 1 Kings 19:8–13). While fasting, he restored the child to the widow, fasting granting him power over death (see 1 Kings 17:17–24).”<sup>417</sup>

### **1019. What is the link between fasting and the friends of the bridegroom?**

Why did Christ our Lord say, “Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast” (Matt. 9:15)? The purpose of fasting is to admit us to the Bridegroom’s presence where we can enjoy the wedding through repentance. For if the Bridegroom Himself is present, why should they fast? But when He ascends bodily and leaves them, then the Church fasts adorning herself for His second coming when she will be united with Him in the eternal wedding. As long as the Bridegroom is ascended, we do not see Him in the flesh, and we must fast from every pleasure and luxury that we may attain the superior heavenly nourishment, and exalted glories whose essence is union with the Bridegroom Himself. **St. Basil the Great** believes that fasting lifts the soul up to heaven, “as if it were its wings for the upwards journey” and it is “adornment for seniors, a good companion on journeys.”<sup>418</sup>

If one visits his brother after a long absence that lasted for decades, and the visit was unexpected so that his brother was eating when he came, would we not expect the brother to leave what he is eating, no matter how hungry he was, to embrace his brother? What a joyful surprise this would be! Likewise, by fasting we leave our tables, not as way of asceticism, but more because of our preoccupation with the Heavenly One, that we may encounter Him, enter into sweet conversation with Him, express our longing for Him, and escape the distractions of our bodily needs.

### **1020. Why does the Creator call us to practice the way of the angels?**

When humans enslaved their souls to their bellies, they were deprived of the Garden of Eden. However, God’s desire is not to call the children of Adam to an earthly garden but to a heavenly paradise, where we will not need either food or drink. Thus, fasting is a sign of the believer’s joyful acceptance of this calling.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “As the resurrection holds forth to us a life equal with the angels, and with the angels there is no food, there is sufficient ground for believing that man,

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<sup>417</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.6 (PP 50:61).

<sup>418</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.7 (PP 50:63).

who will live in like fashion with the angels, will be released from such a function [from slavery to food and drink].”<sup>419</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “It is because we did not fast that we were banished from paradise. So let us fast that we may return to it,”<sup>420</sup> and, “for fasting restores to us the losses that were incurred by Adam’s failure to fast and reconciles us with God.”

**St. Jerome** says, “They despised angels’ food, and sighed for the flesh of Egypt. Moses for forty days and forty nights fasted on Mount Sinai, and showed even then that man does not live on bread alone, but on every word of God. He says to the Lord, ‘the people are full and make idols.’ Moses with empty stomach received the law written with the finger of God. The people that ate and drank and rose up to play fashioned a golden calf, and preferred an Egyptian ox to the majesty of the Lord. The toil of so many days perished through the fulness of a single hour. Moses boldly broke the tables: for he knew that drunkards cannot hear the word of God (Deut. 32:15).”<sup>421</sup>

**St. Philoxenus of Mabbug** says, “Why are you defeated by the stomach like an infant and become a mockery by which a childhood’s passion will laugh at you? ... It is not the fruit that Eve had eaten that gave birth to death, but the desire of the fruit gave birth to death. If [Eve] had kept the law and had not eaten with desire at that time, how many times afterward would she have eaten of it and not have been blamed, when simply she would have approached it like any other tree?”<sup>422</sup>

### **1021. How does fasting prepare us for spiritual warfare?**

In the temptation on the mountain in the wilderness, Christ our Commander in war fasted (Matt. 4:1–2) that we may imitate Him, being His faithful soldiers. He is our perfect model and leader, who trains us to fast while fixing our gaze on our Commander who fasted and confounded Satan and his kingdom. The Fathers knew that the fasts of the Church are the seasons of the most intense demonic warfare. In their discriminating spiritual understanding, they took this to be a sign of the terror that those who truly fast instill in demons.

**St. Augustine** says, “When the tempter intensifies his warfare, we must fast so that the body may fulfil its Christian duty in striving against the desires of the world through repentance, urging the soul to conquer in humility.”

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<sup>419</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* 18.9 (NPNF II/5:408).

<sup>420</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.4 (PP 50:57).

<sup>421</sup> St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 2.15 (NPNF II/6:399) amended.

<sup>422</sup> St. Philoxenus of Mabbug, *The Discourses of Philoxenus of Mabbug: A New Translation and Introduction*, trans., Robert A. Kitchen (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2013) 11.25, 32 (440, 446): pp. 343, 348.

**St. John Saba** says, “Do not overfill your belly, lest fornication torture you. Do not greatly weaken your body, lest your enemy make you weary. Hold to a rule and, behold, henceforth you will go forward on the royal way and your journey will be without fear.”<sup>423</sup>

**St. Cyril** says, “‘He afterwards hungered,’ because, on the other hand, it was necessary that He Who refused not our poverty should withdraw from nothing whatsoever that belongs to man’s condition, He consented for His flesh to require its natural supplies; and hence the words, ‘He hungered.’”<sup>424</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “all strife against sin and its desires is to be preceded by the labour of fasting, especially if one is combating inward sin.”<sup>425</sup> He again says, “And also our Saviour, when He manifested Himself to the world at the Jordan, began from that point. For when He had been baptised, the spirit led Him into the wilderness, and then He fasted forty days and forty nights. And all those who follow His steps, base the beginning of their struggle upon this action. That weapon was polished by God, who should despise it without being blameworthy? If the lawgiver has fasted, to which guardian of the law is it not necessary to do likewise?”<sup>426</sup>

**St. John of Thebes** says, “Bodily fasting is abstinence from food, but spiritual fasting is hunger and thirst for righteousness.”

**St. Jerome** says, “After you have paid the most careful attention to your thoughts, you must then put on the armour of fasting and sing with David: ‘I chastened my soul with fasting,’ (Ps. 69:10) and ‘I have eaten ashes like bread,’ (Ps. 102:9) ... Eve was expelled from paradise because she had eaten of the forbidden fruit. Elijah on the other hand after forty days of fasting was carried in a fiery chariot into heaven ... and in Job it is written of behemoth that ‘his strength is in his loins, and his force is in the navel of his belly’ (Job 40:16).”<sup>427</sup>

## 1022. Does God expect us to destroy the body when we fast?

Fasting is the bowing down of the whole human being before the Holy Spirit that He may sanctify him. God does not desire the destruction of the body, but its sanctification. Thus, in addition to bodily fasting, the believer practices holy spiritual fasting, through which the soul is liberated from all impurities and becomes able to ascend freely towards heaven. **St. John**

<sup>423</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 20.2: p. 104.

<sup>424</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 12: p. 53.

<sup>425</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 35 (238): p. 160.

<sup>426</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 35 (240): p. 161–162.

<sup>427</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 130.10 (NPNF II/6:266).

**Cassian** writes, “We ought therefore, whenever the outward man fasts, to restrain the inner man as well from food which is bad for him: that inner man, namely, which the blessed Apostle above all urges us to present pure before God, that it may be found worthy to receive Christ within.”<sup>428</sup>

**1023. What does the prophet when he says, “Consecrate a fast ... call a sacred assembly” (Joel 1:14; 2:15)?**

To consecrate a fast is to encounter the Holy God; and the calling of a sacred assembly is the whole believer’s engrossment in the vision of God and dialogue with Him, that he may partake in the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4) and bear the marks of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 6:17). In our fasts, we pray to be united with our Christ by the work of His Holy Spirit, to become a holy icon of Him. We savor the divine commandment and pray for the divine promise: “You shall therefore consecrate yourselves, and you shall be holy; for I am holy” (Lev. 11:44). We resist evil, not out of fear of eternal punishment, but out of desire to become an icon of the Holy One.

**St. Aphrahat** says, “It is not fitting for a man to mix honey with wormwood (Prov. 5:3–4). Indeed, if a man fast from bread and water, he should not mix with his fast abuses and curses. For, there is only one door for your house, which is the temple of God. O man, it is not fitting for you that the door through which the king comes in it, that goes out from it excrement and filth. For, if a person abstains from all these hateful things and receives the body and blood of Christ, he should take care of his mouth through which the Son of the King comes in. You have no authority, O man, to bring forth foul language from your mouth.”<sup>429</sup>

**St. Basil** also says, “True fasting is being a stranger to vice, controlling the tongue, abstaining from anger, distancing oneself from lust, evil speech, lying, perjury. The absence of these vices makes fasting true, and so shunning these vices makes fasting good.”<sup>430</sup>

**St. Evagrius** says, “He who disciplines his body wisely becomes passionless, but when he feeds his body (with gluttony) suffers from the passions.”

**Abba Dorotheos** says, “One should also fast with the eyes, that is, not look at vain things, not give freedom to the eyes, not look shamelessly and without fear at anyone.”<sup>431</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 5.21 (NPNFII/11:241).

<sup>429</sup> *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavan (St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) Demonstration 3.2: pp. 62.

<sup>430</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, “Directions on Spiritual Training” in *Early Fathers From the Philokalia*, translated from the Russian text, “Dobrotolubiye,” by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer, eighth edition (London: Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1981) 102: p. 176.

<sup>431</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.2 (PP 50:56).

**St. Basil** says, “Do not doll yourself up with gloom in an attempt to win renown by the appearance of self-control ... Ostentatious deeds do not bear fruit that extends to the age to come but culminate in being praised by others.”<sup>432</sup>

#### **1024. How can the believer offer his fast as a sacrifice of love?**

Through fasting, we declare the desire of our hearts to partake with our Christ in His sacrificial love. When the believer feels hungry or thirsty, he offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving to God who allowed him to partake in His cross or in His sacrificial love, and at the same time God inhales this sacrifice as a soothing aroma.

**St. John Cassian** says, “The duty of fasting becomes acceptable before God when it is perfected with the fruits of love.”

And **St. Evagrius** says, “When the soul desires to seek after a variety of foods then it is time to afflict it with bread and water that it may learn to be grateful for a mere morsel of bread.”<sup>433</sup>

#### **1025. How can we practice fasting so that we are led by love?**

The Church Fathers were saddened by those who fast by just replacing the types of food they eat, while still carrying within them the desire for food and practicing gluttony. Through fasting, we save the cost of expensive food so we can give this money to our needy brothers and sisters — the least of Christ’s brethren as He called them [see Matt. 25:40]. Through fasting, the believer’s heart and inner sight are opened to see the Lord of Glory in every person, especially in the needy and the suffering. For this reason, **St. Augustine** says that if one does not reserve some of his money during the fast to give to the poor, his fasting is without flavor. He also says, “Do you wish your prayer to fly toward God? ... Make for it two wings: fasting and almsgiving.”

#### **1026. How can we practice fasting as a sabbath to the Lord and find rest in Him?**

**St. Basil** believes that it is befitting for the believer to count fasting as a celebration of rest and the sabbath. The believer, his servants, and all the workers in his house, should mark the fast by not only finding spiritual rest, but also devoting the time normally given to cooking to spiritual worship instead. He says, “The butcher puts down his knife and the table is content with plants. The Sabbath was given to the Jews, it says, that *your donkey and your manservant* might rest (Ex. 20:10). Let fasting be for your household servants a rest from their perpetual labors, seeing that they serve you for the whole year. Give your meat cook a rest. Give your tablesetter a holiday. Stay the hand of your winepourer. Give some time off

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<sup>432</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.2 (PP 50:56).

<sup>433</sup> St. Evagrius of Pontus, *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos. Chapters on Prayer*, trans., John Eudes Bamberger (Cistercian Publications, 1972) 16: p. 21.

to your pastry chef, who makes a variety of desserts. Give your household some quiet from the endless clamor, from the smoke and cooking aromas, and from the servants who run up and down to cater to your stomach as if it were an imperious lady. As a matter of fact, even tax collectors permit their subordinates a little freedom. Your stomach should also give your mouth a kind of vacation and agree to a five-day truce with us [his audience was about to begin a five-day fast], seeing that it makes endless demands but never ceases.”<sup>434</sup>

### **1027. How can we practice fasting as worship in spirit?**

The Church Fathers linked fasting to worship in spirit and truth; namely, prayer, contemplation on the word of God, prostrations (metanoias), almsgiving, and the partaking of the holy mysteries.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “may the fast with which the Jews were threatened not come upon us: *Behold the days are coming, says the Lord, and I will send a famine upon this land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the word of the Lord* (Amos 8:11). It was for this reason that the Just Judge sent it, because he saw their mind was wasting away from a lack of the nourishment that comes from the doctrines of truth, yet their external man was growing enormously fat and obese. And so, in the coming days the Holy Spirit will give you a feast at both the morning and evening festivities. No one should willingly absent themselves from this spiritual banquet. Let all of us share in the sober cup. It has been prepared by Wisdom, who hands it to us equally, to the extent that each has the capacity to drink it. *For she has prepared her cup and slaughtered her beasts* (Prov. 9:2), that is, *the food for the perfect, for those who have their faculties trained by practice to distinguish good from evil* (Heb. 5:14). Filled with such an abundance, may we be found worthy too of the joy experienced in the bridegroom’s chamber, in Christ Jesus our Lord.”<sup>435</sup>

The scholar **Tertullian** says, “They who are about to enter baptism ought to pray with repeated prayers, fasts, prostrations, and vigils all the night through, and with the confession of all bygone sins.”<sup>436</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Blessed is he that knows how to be full in Christ. Not corporal, but spiritual, is that satiety which knowledge brings about.”<sup>437</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** links fasting to prayer when he likens fasting to a live coal which, if no incense of prayer is sprinkled on it, will produce a choking smoke rather a sweet aroma of incense. **Tertullian** says that we should “feed prayers on fastings.”<sup>438</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.7 (PP 50:64).

<sup>435</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 2.8 (PP 50:81).

<sup>436</sup> Tertullian, *On Baptism* 20 (ANF 3:678).

<sup>437</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 2.17.92 (NPNF II/10:57).

<sup>438</sup> Tertullian, *On Repentance* 9 (ANF 3:664).

**St. Augustine** links fasting with brotherly love saying, “In this question, however, of fasting or not fasting on the seventh day, nothing appears to me more safe and conducive to peace than the Apostle's rule: ‘Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat, and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats’ (Rom. 14:3) ‘for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse’ (1 Cor. 8:8). Our fellowship with those among whom we live, and along with whom we live in God, being preserved undisturbed by these things.”<sup>439</sup>

### 1028. What modern medicine’s view of fasting?

The Church considers fasting to be medicine for the soul. Modern medicine today proclaims the benefits of a vegetarian diet, and of periods of abstinence from food for the sake of the health of the body. In this way, the wisdom of the Church in linking the soul to the body is affirmed.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that a moderate life in Christ Jesus is the royal way that leads us to heaven. Therefore, he warns us against living in luxury or squandering our money. At the same time, we should be moderate in our food, clothing, and furniture according to every person’s age, job, and health. St. Clement talks about food and drink in his book, *Paedagogus (The Instructor)* and says that we eat to live, and not live to eat.<sup>440</sup> Our diet must be simple and aimed towards growth, health, and producing energy, though always in a controlled way. Gluttony should be avoided.

We must also not forget that love (*agape*) is practiced when having a meal together with the community, as Job did with his children (Job 1:4–5). This meal was commonly practiced in the early Church till the third century. As for drink, it is said that a little wine is good for an infirm stomach (1 Tim. 5:23), since only a small amount is taken for medical purposes.

“No one who uses [a lavish diet] will ever study to become temperate, burying as he does his mind in his belly, very like the fish called ass, which, Aristotle says, alone of all creatures has its heart in its stomach. This fish Epicharmus the comic poet calls ‘monster-paunch.’ Such are the men who believe in their belly, ‘whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.’ To them the apostle predicted no good when he said, ‘whose end is destruction’ (Phil. 3:19).”<sup>441</sup>

“For, quite the contrary, those who use the most frugal fare are the strongest and the healthiest, and the noblest; as domestics are healthier and stronger than their masters, and husbandmen than the proprietors; and not only more robust, but wiser, as philosophers are wiser than rich men.”<sup>442</sup>

<sup>439</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 36.26 (NPNF I/1:268).

<sup>440</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:237).

<sup>441</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:242).

<sup>442</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:238).

“Some men, in truth, live that they may eat, as the irrational creatures, ‘whose life is their belly, and nothing else.’ But the Instructor enjoins us to eat that we may live. For neither is food our business, nor is pleasure our aim; but both are on account of our life here, which the Word is training up to immortality. Wherefore also there is discrimination to be employed in reference to food. And it is to be simple, truly plain, suiting precisely simple and artless children—as ministering to life, not to luxury.”<sup>443</sup>

“The food of those who are saved and those who perish is separate ... For it were not seemly that we, after the fashion of the rich man’s son in the Gospel (Luke 15:11), should, as prodigals, abuse the Father’s gifts; but we should use them, without undue attachment to them, as having command over ourselves. For we are enjoined to reign and rule over meats, not to be slaves to them.”<sup>444</sup>

And **St. Basil** says, “Fasting is truly the medicine of the soul and of the body also. Eating luxurious foods afflicts us with certain difficult illnesses of the body. But fasting is beneficial for health, granting the fasting person a good complexion, calm eyes, balanced gait, and composed movements. You will never see this person cackling, although he smiles; never screaming out, although he speaks calmly and with balance; and you will find that his words flow from a clean and pure heart.”<sup>445</sup>

He also says, “What is required in fasting is not the abstinence of the mouth, but of the eyes, ears, hands, and entire body. We fast with pure hands that avoid theft, with legs that avoid forbidden places, with eyes that avoid looking upon anything that is provocative ... I wonder what abstinence from meat means if we do not abstain from eating the flesh of our neighbors through gossiping and slander? And what does abstinence from food mean if we do not abstain from evil thoughts, adultery, malice, and hatred? ... Fasting is the wing of prayer that raises it to heaven and breaks through to the throne of God ... Fasting is the expansion of households, the mother of health, the pedagogue of youth, an adornment for seniors, a good companion on journeys ... By fasting, I do not mean abstinence from necessary food, for this will lead to death. Rather, I mean abstinence from foods that cause the body to rebel. The person who fasts truly is the one who abstains from all bodily passions, even those that are natural.”<sup>446</sup>

### **1029. What is the purpose of fasting?**

**First. Acquisition of virtues:** **St. Jerome** says, “Fasting is not itself an absolute virtue, but the foundation of virtues.”

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<sup>443</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:237).

<sup>444</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:239).

<sup>445</sup> See al-Mukhlessy, Elias Koyter, *St. Basil the Great (Arabic)* (Publications of the Pauline Library in Beirut, 1989): p. 289.

<sup>446</sup> See al-Mukhlessy, Elias Koyter, *St. Basil the Great (Arabic)* (Publications of the Pauline Library in Beirut, 1989): p. 290.



**Second. Motivation to give thanks: St. Evagrius** believes that the person who fasts becomes aware of the grace of God at work within him: “Those who excessively feed their bodies to fulfil their desires (Rom. 13:14) ... when they become no longer lustful, although they remain in the same body; and when they become active in their contemplation of the One God, the true Being, as much as possible; such people confess the Creator’s graciousness to them, for He granted them this body.”

**Third. Appreciation of food as a blessing: St. Basil** believes that while fasting is an opportunity to abstain from food, then end of fasting is an opportunity for rejoicing in food — not with excessive indulgence, but with a sense of the blessedness of food. “After all, just as thirst makes drinking pleasurable and hunger before a meal makes eating pleasurable, so too fasting enhances the enjoyment of food when it is partaken ... Don’t you realize that ... health is more appreciated after the experience of the contrary? So too is the table more charming after fasting.”<sup>447</sup>

**Fourth. Freedom from enslavement to one’s belly: Abba Theonas** says, “We never read that anyone is condemned simply for taking food, but only when something was joined with it or followed afterwards, for which he deserved condemnation.”<sup>448</sup> And **St. John Climacus** says, “Master your stomach before it masters you.”<sup>449</sup>

### 1030. Why does the Church conclude most of her fasts with a relevant feast?

The purpose of fasting is to enable us to enjoy the heavenly feast, or to experience heavenly joy. During our fasts, our minds are immersed in rejoicing in the Lord of Glory, Jesus, who was born to offer us His life as heavenly bread to satisfy our souls. We are occupied with His salvific work by which He granted us the resurrection of our souls, which were undone by death and corrupted by destructive sin.

In his fasts, the true believer does not know frowning but is always smiling as a reflection of his inner joy. The early Church Fathers often stressed the positive side of fasting, which is nothing but opening the way before the human soul to ascend to heaven by the working of grace, to see our Lord by faith and rejoice in Him.

Quite possibly, their attention was drawn to this principle by Christ’s advice to those who fast to anoint their heads and wash their faces (Matt. 6:17–18). There are perhaps two odd matters here. The anointing of the head, especially in the first century A. D., was not something practiced by men, youth, or children — so why is it necessary for them to do so if they fast? And the washing of the face is something we must do whether we fast or not, so what need is there for this advice to those who fast? Clearly, this is a symbolic invitation to

<sup>447</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Fasting and Feasts* 1.8 (PP 50:64–65).

<sup>448</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 21.13 (NPNF II/11:365).

<sup>449</sup> John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 14.17: p. 142.

live the life of joy. The anointing of the head refers to the ointment that is upon the head, the ointment of the Holy Spirit that comes down upon Christ, our Head [cf. Ps. 133:2]. Thus, the fragrance of Christ fills the world through us, and the world encounters the fruit of the Spirit through our love and joy. And the washing of the face refers to the removal of dust from the face that we may see the Lord without any hindrance, and thus we witness to Him with the smile on our inner faces.

**St. Severus of Antioch** says, “When Isaiah the Prophet raises them from this bottomless pit (i.e., their clinging to carnal matters), he raises them by drawing their minds upwards by declaring the greatness of fasting; and so he impels them towards spiritual joy and expels grief and sorrow from their spirits, and implores them saying, ‘Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes?’ (Isa. 58:5). Therefore, when our Lord declares the splendor and joy of fasting, He also commands them clearly saying, ‘But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face’ (Matt. 6:17). He thus shows us that the flourishing and purity of the spirit are attained through the main members of the body. The Lord Himself commands us to wash ourselves and be purified by avoiding evil; and on the other hand, to adorn ourselves by doing good deeds illuminated by spiritual grace.”<sup>450</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “We must understand this precept with respect to anointing the head and washing the face as referring to the inner man. Hence, to anoint the head refers to joy; to wash the face, on the other hand, refers to purity.”<sup>451</sup>

### **1031. How is our Christ transfigured through the fasting of the Church?**

The purpose of the fasts of the Church is to entreat the Savior to work in all humanity.

**First. In weekly fasts** (Wednesday and Friday): On Wednesday, the conspiracy to crucify Christ was hatched. Therefore, the believer fasts to thank God who turns the malice of the evil to the service of salvation. On Friday the believer sees, with **St. Jacob of Sarug**, Mount Golgotha turned into a wedding mount where Christ offers His bride, the Church, her dowry. Thus, the fasts of Wednesdays and Fridays lead us to the day of the Lord who rose from the dead, early on Sunday morning, so that our hearts rejoice and cry out that the Lord may grant us a resurrected life that prepares us for paradise.

#### **Second. The annual fasts:**

During the **Nativity Fast** [Christmas Fast], the believer does not cease praying for all humanity so that the Baby in the manger (Luke 2:7) may dwell in their hearts, minds, and emotions.

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<sup>450</sup> Deacon Youssef Habib, *Fasting* (Arabic): pp. 16–17.

<sup>451</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on Mount* 2.12.42 (NPNF I/6:47).

During **Great Lent** the believer rejoices as he shares in Christ's fast, in order to celebrate the Christian passover. Every day he prays to the Lord to pass his mind, heart, and emotions over to the heavenly life.

During the **Apostles' Fast**, the believer's heart burns with longing to share with the Apostles in preaching of the gospel of Christ.

During **Jonah's Fast**, we pray for non-believers that God may work in them as He did with the people of Nineveh.

During **St. Mary's Fast**, we pray that Christ may dwell in our hearts just as the Word of God was incarnate in her womb.

### **1032. What is the trajectory of the Church's thought throughout the Lenten fast?**

The Sunday Gospels of Lent reveal the Church's understanding of the concept of fasting and sketch out the contemplations to which the Church invites us as we journey through the fast:

1. **Sunday of Preparation:** Nothing should occupy our minds or hearts while we prepare for fasting other than the encounter with God our heavenly Father. By fasting, we experience new depths of our relationship with God. On the Sunday before Lent, we ought to expel from ourselves every bondage to the desires for food and drink. The Church presents us with a positive, joyful perspective, which is the hidden encounter with our Heavenly Father. The Church reads to us the gospel passage that concerns the pillars of Christian worship, as Christ presented them in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 6:1–18), namely, almsgiving, prayer, and fasting. Here, we see that these ought to be offered as sacrifices of love, secretly offered to the heavenly Father behind closed doors, so that we can taste this mutual love. Our heavenly Father initiates love, and we respond to this love with love.

At the end of the Lenten fast, on Palm Sunday, the Church reads the gospel chapters about Christ's entrance into Jerusalem. Having begun the fast by declaring our deep and secret attachment to God our Father, we conclude the fast by seeing Christ entering into our hearts to create from their depths His beloved Jerusalem and its divine kingdom. In fact, fasting is not so much about being deprived of food as it is about being satisfied with God and sharing in the banquet of angels.

2. **Sunday of Treasures:** With the beginning of Lent, the Church reads to us a passage concerning heavenly treasure (Matt. 6:19–33). To fast is to come into possession of a heavenly treasure, that is, Christ Himself our divine treasure (2 Cor. 4:7).
3. **Sunday of Temptation:** Our entering into new depths in our relationship with Christ provokes the devil, who wages spiritual wars and temptations against us. But we take shelter in Christ fasting in the wilderness, He to whom the angels came and ministered

after His temptation (Matt. 4:11), and we share in the benefit of their ministry. Fasting is an invitation to receive this blessing.

4. **Sunday of the Prodigal Son** (Luke 15): Through fasting, we not only prepare ourselves to be served by angels, but also to offer our repentance to God. We find our heavenly Father running towards us, falling on our necks, greeting us, and embracing us close to His divine bosom.
5. **Sunday of the Heavenly Wedding** (the **Samaritan Woman**, John 4): Through our repentance, we return to the bosom of the Father and are granted the heavenly wedding. The Samaritan Woman — who was never satisfied with her five husbands, nor with the man with whom she now lived — found her true spiritual satiety in Christ. So, she left her waterpot and set out to call everyone in her city to share the enjoyment of this satiety with her.
6. **Sunday of the Paralyzed Man at Bethesda** (John 5): Now that we are betrothed to Christ — as St. Paul says, “For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ” (2 Cor. 11:2) — we unite with the Physician of souls and bodies. He heals us as He healed the paralyzed man at Bethesda (John 5).
7. **Sunday of the Man Born Blind** (John 9): He who benefits from the heavenly Physician’s treatment is blessed with open eyes that see and touches divine mysteries. This is the gift of the heavenly Bridegroom who gifts His mysteries to His bride.
8. Finally, **Palm Sunday**: Having completed our journey through Lent, the Church now begins the Holy Week (Paschal Week) with the gospels about Christ’s entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday. This is when Christ enters our hearts, we who are His beloved Jerusalem, implanting His cross in it, and granting it the power of His Resurrection, so that we can partake of the eternal heavenly feast.

# 11

## Worship and ‘Dying with Christ’

### 1033. Why do Paul the apostle and so many Church Fathers strongly stress the concept of ‘dying with Christ’?

The apostle Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). He understood that whoever suffers, is crucified, dies, and is buried with Christ, will enjoy the sweet fragrance of Christ. Whoever attaches himself to the crucified Christ and becomes one with Him no longer seeks the pleasures of the world, but rather takes pleasure only in being crucified, buried, and risen with Christ. For him, the bitterness of the world is transformed into sweetness. He takes the bitter myrrh that embalmed the body of Christ in the tomb and anoints his own body with it, and thus carries about the sweet fragrance of Christ wherever he goes (2 Cor. 2:15).

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “Hence, the person who intends to dedicate himself to the worship of God will not be frankincense burned for God unless he has first become myrrh—that is, unless he mortifies his earthly members, having been buried together with the one who submitted to death on our behalf and having received in his own flesh, through mortification of its members, that myrrh which was used to prepare the Lord for burial. When these things have come to pass, every species of the fragrances that belong to virtue—once they have been ground fine in the bowl of life as in some mortar—produces that sweet cloud of dust, and he who inhales it becomes sweet-smelling because he has become full of the fragrant Spirit.”<sup>452</sup>

### 1034. If worship is a call to joy, how is dying with Christ related to it?

In the Old Testament, a believer could not reconcile dying to oneself with worship, because death at the time was understood as being a result of humanity’s disobedience to God and separation from Him who is the Source of life. Nonetheless, there were still a few people who did not fear death because they hoped to meet God and were determined to strive — whether in their worship or in their behavior — even unto death. For this reason, the psalmist says, “For Your sake we are killed all day long” (Ps. 44:22).

In the New Testament, Christ gave Himself up to crucifixion out of His love and desire for the salvation of humanity. Thus, being crucified, buried, and dying with Christ became an inseparable part of a believer’s life, his communion with the Lord, and worship. Therefore, the believer sings with the apostle Paul saying, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no

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<sup>452</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 6: p. 173.

longer I who live, but Christ lives in me and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

The apostle Paul does not see the Lord Christ as a model that we can perfectly imitate, since no one can redeem humanity but Him. But Christ is nonetheless an example for us that we can imitate by offering our lives and everything we have for the sake of the salvation of the world through the blood of Christ. That is one aspect, but another aspect is that my crucifixion, death, and burial for the sake of the salvation of others instills in my soul joy and gladness in Christ Jesus our Savior.

### **1035. What does the apostle mean by being crucified with the Lord Christ and dying with Him?**

**First: Abiding in the heavenly Christ.** St. Paul in no way considers Christian life to obligate a person to die with Christ by withdrawing from the world. Rather, through faith, the believer partakes in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection while being in the world, and so dies to the ‘old man’ [cf. Eph. 4:22] that he was in order to live for God in Christ.

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “‘I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20). Now our life, my brethren, truly consists in our denying all bodily things, and continuing steadfast in those only of our Savior.”<sup>453</sup> Again he says, “For that is the true life, which a man lives in Christ; for although they are dead to the world, yet they dwell as it were in heaven, minding those things which are above, as he who was a lover of such a habitation said, ‘While we walk on earth, our dwelling is in heaven’ (cf. Phil. 3:20).”<sup>454</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “Christ lives in us. Therefore, at His crucifixion, He said to His mother concerning John, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ (John 19:26). Thus, whoever becomes perfect lives not for his own sake, but Christ lives in him.”

**Second: Renouncing the ego.** The scholar **Origen** says, “Moreover in regard to the saying, ‘Let him deny himself’ (Matt. 16:24), the following saying of Paul who denied himself seems appropriate, ‘Yet I live, and yet no longer I but Christ lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20); for the expression, ‘I live, yet no longer I,’ was the voice of one denying himself, as of one who had laid aside his own life and taken on himself the Christ, in order that He might live in him as Righteousness, and as Wisdom, and as Sanctification, and as our Peace (1 Cor. 1:30; Eph. 2:14), and as the Power of God, who works all things in him.”<sup>455</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* 5.4 (NPNF II/4:518).

<sup>454</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* 7:3 (NPNF II/4:524).

<sup>455</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* 12.25 (ANF 9:464) amended.

**St. Augustine** says, “For if by loving himself man is lost, surely by denying himself he is found ... Let him withdraw himself from himself, but not towards things below. Let him withdraw himself from himself, that he may cleave unto God.”<sup>456</sup>

**Third: Partaking of divine love.** In speaking of the Church’s love for her Christ, the apostle Paul says, “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom. 8:36). This is the voice of the whole Church from Adam until the end of times, as it continually accepts to walk in the path of witnessing to God even to the point of death. The Church accepts to partake in the sufferings of Christ with joy, and desires to be counted as “sheep for the slaughter,” just as He was led as a lamb to the slaughter (Isa. 53:7). We practice a voluntary death daily: not by literally shedding our blood, but by our spiritual striving, sacrifice, and giving to all — even non-believers — for the sake of God the lover of humanity.

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** says, “I am a Priest of the Most High, to whom I daily offer a sacrifice and blessed indeed should I consider myself were I to be sacrificed to His glory.”

“Let fire and the cross; let the crowds of wild beasts; let tearings, breakings, and dislocations of bones ... let all the dreadful torments of the devil come upon me: only let me attain to Jesus Christ.”<sup>457</sup>

“Suffer me to obtain pure light: when I have gone thither, I shall indeed be a man of God. Permit me to be an imitator of the passion of my God.”<sup>458</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He makes them; without death, a sacrifice and offering.”<sup>459</sup> He also says, “For it is possible in a day to die not once alone or twice, but many times. For he who is always ready unto this, keeps continually receiving a full reward.”<sup>460</sup>

**Abba Dorotheos of Gaza** says, “But the saints who offer [sacrifice] themselves to God, offer themselves alive, every day—as David says, ‘For your sake we are put to death all the day long, we are considered as sheep for the slaughter’ (Ps. 44:22). St. Gregory says, ‘Let us offer ourselves as first-fruits [of the resurrection],’ that is, let us sacrifice ourselves, let us die to ourselves all the day long, as did all the saints, for the sake of Christ our God. How did they put themselves to death? By not loving the world or what is in the world (1 John 2:15) ... About this the Apostle says, ‘Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires’ (Gal. 5:24). This is how the saints put themselves to death.”<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>456</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 46.1–2 (NPNF I/6:408–409).

<sup>457</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 5 (ANF 1:75–76).

<sup>458</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Romans* 6 (ANF 1:76).

<sup>459</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 82.1 (NPNF I/14:301).

<sup>460</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 15 (NPNF I/11:456).

<sup>461</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*. Cistercian Studies Series: Number 33, trans., Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977): p. 222.

“And what sort of gift ought we to offer to Christ in order to please him on the day of his Resurrection, if he does not desire the sacrifice of senseless animals? The Saint [Gregory Nazianzen] in his teaching tells us the answer, for after saying, ‘It is the Day of Resurrection,’ he adds, ‘Let us offer up its first-fruits, which is ourselves.’ The Apostle too instructs us: ‘Offer up your own bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and well-pleasing to God, the worship that your reason dictates’ (Rom.12:1). How then ought we to make an offering of our bodies as a living sacrifice to God? ‘By no longer following our physical desires and our own ideas’ (Eph. 2:3), but ‘walking in the spirit and not fulfilling the desires of the flesh’ (Gal. 5:16). ‘For this is to mortify our earthly members’ (Col. 3:5).”<sup>462</sup>

**Fourth: Participating in the procession of victory.** No longer can suffering and hardship shatter the soul, for they have become our entrance to the victory march led by Jesus Christ who suffered and was crucified.

**Fifth: Mortifying evil desires. St. Jerome** says, “Therefore, as you lie on your couch, say again and again: ‘By night on my bed I sought the one I love’ (Song 3:1). Mortify, therefore, says the apostle, your members which are upon the earth (Col. 3:5). Because he himself did so, he could afterwards say with confidence: ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ, lives in me’ (Gal. 2:20). He who mortifies his members, and feels that he is walking in a vain show, is not afraid to say: ‘I have become like a bottle in the frost’ (cf. Ps. 119:83). Whatever there was in me of the moisture of lust has been dried out of me. And again: ‘My knees are weak through fasting; I forget to eat my bread. By reason of the voice of my groaning my bones cleave to my skin’ (cf. Ps. 109:24).”<sup>463</sup>

**St. Irenaeus** also says, “This same, therefore, was what the Lord came to accomplish, that as in Adam we do all die, as being of an animal nature, in Christ we may all live, as being spiritual, not laying aside God’s handiwork, but the lusts of the flesh, and receiving the Holy Spirit; as the apostle says in the Epistle to the Colossians: ‘Mortify, therefore, your members which are upon the earth.’ And what these are he himself explains: ‘Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry’ (Col. 3:5). The laying aside of these is what the apostle preaches and he declares that those who do such things, as being merely flesh and blood, cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. For their soul, tending towards what is worse, and descending to earthly lusts, has become a partaker in the same designation which belongs to these which, when the apostle commands us to lay aside, he says in the same Epistle, ‘Put off the old man with his deeds’ (Col. 3:9). But when he said this, he does not remove away the ancient formation ‘of man,’ for in that case it would be incumbent on us to rid ourselves of its company by committing suicide.”<sup>464</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*. Cistercian Studies Series: Number 33, trans., Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977): pp. 221–222.

<sup>463</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 22.17 (NPNF II/6:28).

<sup>464</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 5.12.3 (ANF 1:538).



**St. Ambrose** says, “What indeed is death but the burial of vices and the awakening of virtues? For this reason ‘may my soul depart among the souls of the righteous,’ that is, ‘may it be buried together with them’ (Num. 23:10 LXX; cf. Col. 2:12), that it may lay down its sins and take up the grace of the just, who ‘bear about the dying of Christ in their body’ (2 Cor. 4:10) and soul,”<sup>465</sup> and, “The soul who is about to receive the Word should be such that she dies to the world (Gal. 6:14) and is buried together in Christ (Rom. 6:4; Col. 2:12)! So it is that Christ is found, and such is the reception he asks for himself.”<sup>466</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “How can you obey Paul when he exhorts you to offer your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, when you are conformed to this world and not transformed by the renewing of your mind, when you are not walking in this newness of life, but still pursuing the routine of the old man?”<sup>467</sup>

**St. Jerome** also says, “Let us hear also the declaration which Ezekiel the so called ‘son of man’ (Ezek. 2:1) makes concerning the virtue of him who is to be the true son of man, the Christian: ‘I will take you, he says: from among the heathen’ ... then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your filthiness ... a new heart also will I give you and a new spirit ... Wherefore the song also which we sing is a new song (Rev. 14:3) and putting off the old man (Eph. 4:22) we walk not in the oldness of the letter but in the newness of the spirit. (Rom. 7:6) This is the new stone wherein the new name is written ‘which no man knows saving he that receives it’ (Rev. 2:17).”<sup>468</sup>

**Sixth: Receiving abundant crowns.** **St. John Chrysostom** says that out of God’s abundant love for us, He permits the believer many deaths, so that the believer may receive many crowns. The crowns we receive are in proportion to the measure of our willingness to die daily. We receive crowns because the deaths we accept are regarded as an acceptable sacrifice.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “‘For Your sake we are killed all day long’ (Ps. 44:22) ... For it is possible in a day to die not once alone or twice, but many times. For he who is always ready unto this, keeps continually receiving a full reward ... He shows too that their bodies become a sacrifice, and that we must not be disturbed or troubled at God having so ordered it.”<sup>469</sup>

**Seventh: Becoming more than conquerors.** What does this really mean?

- a. The very snares that are laid to destroy us are those that grant us the life of victory.
- b. We accept dying with Christ without any sense of toil or hardship.

<sup>465</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Death as Good* 4.15 (FOTC 65:81–82).

<sup>466</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Isaac, or the Soul* 6.53 (FOTC 65:43).

<sup>467</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginit* 24 (NPNF II/5:370).

<sup>468</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 69.7 (NPNF II/6:146).

<sup>469</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 15 (NPNF I/11:456).

- c. We resist those who oppose us, not by opposing them in return, but by becoming greater in the eyes of God than those who harm us by violence, exclusion, or persecution. Even if they kill us, this act is considered as being directed against God the Almighty, and they shall live their lives in remorse and bitterness.

On this matter, **St. John Chrysostom** says, “For they did not merely conquer, but in a wondrous way, and so that one might learn that those who plotted against them had a war not against men, but against that invincible Might ... And therefore he says: we are more than conquerors. For this was a new rule of victory for men to prevail by their adversaries, and in no instance to be overcome, but to go forth to these struggles as if they themselves had the issue in their own hands. For it is marvelous indeed, that though they may imprison us and beat us, they are yet at a loss for they are fighting against the Almighty who cannot be overcome.”<sup>470</sup>

**St. Hippolytus** says, “‘She has slaughtered her meat’ [Prov. 9:2] denotes martyrs who in every city and country are slain like sheep every day by the unbelieving, on behalf of the truth, and cry aloud, ‘For your sake we are killed all the day long, we were counted as sheep for the slaughter’ (Ps. 44:22; Rom. 8:36).”<sup>471</sup>

And the martyr **Cyprian** says, “None of these things can separate believers, nothing can tear away those who are clinging to His body and blood. Persecution of that kind is an examination and searching out of the heart. God wills us to be sifted and proved, as He has always proved His people; and yet in His trials help has never at any time been wanting to believers.”<sup>472</sup>

**St. Irenaeus** says, “But here the expression ‘all the day long’ is put for all this time during which we suffer persecution, and are killed as sheep. As then this day does not signify one which consists of twelve hours, but the whole time during which believers in Christ suffer and are put to death for His sake.”<sup>473</sup>

**Eighth: Becoming one with the Apostles.** The apostle Paul unveils the blessing of dying with Christ, making it clear that the faithful live the life of sacrifice and dying with Christ together with the rest of the apostles. Living the life of dying with Christ enables the believer to enter into the mystery of belonging to the family of the Apostles, as St. Paul says: “you are in our hearts, to die together and to live together” (2 Cor. 7:3). In this passage, he explains to his people the concept of a true Father’s love, for he is ready to die with them and live with them. This love is not based on mere human emotions but comes from a yearning to be together as one family in God’s bosom. Their repentance, their salvation, and their eternal life is what makes the apostle rejoice. The apostle was comforted when he heard from Titus of his congregation’s repentance and the comfort they felt from God. And Titus also rejoiced

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<sup>470</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 15 (NPNF I/11:456).

<sup>471</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome *Fragments On Proverbs* 9.1 (ANF 5:175) amended.

<sup>472</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles* 7.5 (ANF 5:287).

<sup>473</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 2.22.2 (ANF 1:390).

and they refreshed his spirit (2 Cor. 7:13). A servant always finds rest in the divine comfort his flock receives through sincere repentance.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “This is the greatest affection, when even though treated with contempt, he chooses both to die and live with them ... ‘For should it chance,’ says he, ‘that danger should invade, for your sakes I am ready to suffer everything; and neither death nor life seems anything to me in itself, but in whichever case, that is to me more desirable, both death than life and life than death.’”<sup>474</sup>

**St Ambrose** also says, “Truly is he a man of priestly mind and spirit who with dutiful affection, like a good shepherd, offered himself for the flock of the Lord. Thus [like Moses] he broke the sting of death, checked its onslaught, refused it further course. Love assisted his merits, for he offered himself in behalf of those who were resisting him.”<sup>475</sup>

**Ninth: Experiencing the righteousness of Christ.** The Lord Christ died on the cross that we may die with Him and live for Him in His righteousness. The apostle Peter says that He “Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed” (1 Pet. 2:24). The apostle explains that the sufferings of the cross were not just about courage or the ability to endure but are in essence an act of love and self-sacrifice, for He willed by His stripes and wounds to heal our wounds. By His own will He bent His back that He may mystically carry our sins in His body, for “Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many” (Heb. 9:28); “Because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors” (Isa. 53:12). The goal of this salvific work is to make us one with Him and enable us to experience His righteousness.

### **1036. Was it possible for the Healer of our sicknesses to suffer sickness Himself?**

The Lord Christ died not because of a sin He committed, but to raise us from our death that came upon us because of our sins. However, it was not appropriate for Him to fall sick so that He may heal our sicknesses. The Fathers explained why the Lord Christ chose to die on the cross. Through His suffering born of love, He showed us His care for us, He who is the “Shepherd and Overseer of our souls” (1 Pet. 2:25). He searches after every sick soul and opens His arms to all who have gone astray. He chose to die “on a tree,” and this was not random, as **Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** explains:

“For it was neither fitting for the Lord to be ill, he who healed the illnesses of others.”<sup>476</sup>

<sup>474</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 14 (NPNF I/12:347).

<sup>475</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters 1–91* 59 (FOTC:26:339). See also Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Pastoral Love* (Arabic), (1965): p. 458.

<sup>476</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 21.6 (PP 44A:97).

“And besides, it was not his own death that the Savior came to complete, but that of human beings.”<sup>477</sup>

“... if the death of the body took place somewhere in secret, death neither appearing nor taking place before witnesses, its resurrection also would be unseen and unwitnessed.”<sup>478</sup>

“For if He came Himself to bear the curse which lay upon us, how else could He have *become a curse* (Gal. 3:13) if he had not accepted the death occasioned by the curse?”<sup>479</sup>

“Moreover, if the death of the Lord is a ransom of all and by his death *the wall of partition* (Eph. 2:14) is broken down, and the call of the Gentiles effected, how would he have called us if he not been crucified? For only upon the cross does one die with his hands stretched out. Therefore it was fitting for the Lord to endure this and to stretch out His hands, that with the one he might draw the ancient people, and with the other those from the Gentiles, and join both together in himself.”<sup>480</sup>

“... he accepted and endured on the cross that inflicted by others, especially by enemies, which they reckoned fearful and ignominious and shameful, in order that this being destroyed, he might Himself be believed to be Life, and the power of death might be completely annihilated.”<sup>481</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “He chose the cross that He may taste the most bitter sufferings. On the cross, He would have to accept a slow death as He became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross (Phil 2:8).”

**Tertullian** explains that Christ chose the cross as the fulfillment of the prophecies and symbols in the Old Testament.<sup>482</sup>

### 1037. How can we imitate the crucified Christ?

The apostle says that He “bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness” (1 Pet. 2:24). **St. Ambrose** says, “he who dies to sin lives to God; do you live to Him Who spared not His own Son, that in His body He might crucify our passions. For Christ died for us, that we might live in His revived Body. Therefore not our life but our guilt died in Him ... That wood of the cross is, then, as it were a kind of ship of our salvation.”<sup>483</sup> He again says, “Who will not learn to forgive, when persecuted, seeing that Christ, even on the Cross, prayed for them that persecuted Him? See you not that

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<sup>477</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 24.2 (PP 44A:99).

<sup>478</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 23.1 (PP 44A:101).

<sup>479</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 25.2 (PP 44A:103).

<sup>480</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 25.3 (PP 44A:103–105).

<sup>481</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 24.3 (PP 44A:103).

<sup>482</sup> See Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews* 10 (ANF 3:164–167).

<sup>483</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.9.109–110 (NPNF II/10:108).

those weaknesses, as you please to call them, of Christ's are your strength? (2 Cor. 12:9, 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:24, 4:13)."<sup>484</sup>

### **1038. In what ways did St. Paul experience dying in Christ?**

The Holy Bible presents us with a splendid model of imitating the Lord Christ — the apostle Paul, who was forced to talk about himself to affirm the authenticity of his apostleship to the Corinthians, that they may also imitate the crucified Christ: “Are they ministers of Christ? — I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often” (2 Cor. 11:23). He cherishes the grace of God that led him and supported him to endure more of the hardships of apostleship than they. As an apostle to the gentiles, he was much hated by the Jews, and they poured more hardships and persecutions upon him than on any other apostle. Whenever the opportunity to oppose him arose, they exerted all their efforts to torture him, and attempted to kill him.

**First. “Labors more abundant.”** He constantly traveled from city to city and from province to province. On many occasions, he had to escape from those who opposed him and sought to kill him, and travel to other lands to evangelize. However, he experienced the hand of God that transforms hardships into opportunities to broaden evangelism and establish the kingdom of light in place of the darkness that reigned over many places.

**Second. “In stripes above measure.”** He was beaten by the pagans who had little regulation of the administration of penalties, and so they mercilessly flogged him with many stripes (Acts 16:23).

**Third. “In prisons more frequently.”** The apostles Paul's story is full of imprisonments, including being held under house arrest for two years in Rome (Acts 28), yet we never hear of a false apostle being imprisoned.

**Fourth. “In deaths often.”** (e.g., Acts 14:19) He anticipated death every day because of the abundance of hardships and persecutions he endured. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “No one else has been granted such a love of the Lord as this blessed spirit. I mean, as though freed from the body and raised on high, so to say, and not considering himself to tread the earth, he delivers himself of all these remarks. You see, desire for God and burning love elevated his thinking from material things to spiritual, from present to future, from visible to unseen. This is what faith is like, after all, and love of God. For proof of his sound attitude, see this man, with his great love for the Lord and his burning desire for him, hunted, persecuted, chastised, suffering countless abuses ... and while suffering such things he rejoiced and was glad. You see, he was quite convinced that the labors of the present life proved an occasion of great reward for him and dangers were the source of a crown. After all, if out of love for Rachel, Jacob regarded as a few days the period of seven years, much more did this blessed man count it all of no consequence, on fire as he was with love of God

<sup>484</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 2.11.95 (NPNF II/10:236).

and prepared to endure everything for the Christ he loved. Let us too, therefore, I beseech you, be concerned to love Christ. Christ looks for nothing else from you, in fact, Scripture says, than loving him with all your heart and carrying out his commands.”<sup>485</sup>

“Isaac’s son, Jacob, you say, is admired in scripture for his strength (Gen. 32:38). But what soul, however adamant, could match the endurance of Paul. He endured slavery not just for fourteen years (Gen. 29:18, 27), but for a lifetime for the bride of Christ, enduring not just the heat of the day and the frost of night, but countless storms of trials — the lash, stoning, fighting with wild beasts, wrestling with the sea, constant hunger day and night, exposure (2 Cor. 11:23f), everywhere avoiding pitfalls and snatching the sheep from the jaws of the devils.”<sup>486</sup>

“He well knew how, on a fitting occasion, to correct his disciples, in a grave and lofty tone: assuredly he had other sources whence to demonstrate the truth of his preaching,—by signs and miracles, by dangers, by prisons, by daily deaths, by hunger and thirst, by nakedness, and the like. Now however that he is speaking not of false apostles, but of the true, who had shared these very perils, he employs another method. For when his discourse was pointed towards false apostles, he institutes a comparison by bringing forward his endurance of danger, saying, ‘Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as one beside himself) I more; in labors more abundantly, in prisons more abundantly, in stripes above measure, in deaths oft’ (2 Cor. 11:23).”<sup>487</sup>

**Fifth. Stripes.** The apostle says, “From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one” (2 Cor. 11:24). He was flogged five times by the Jews who, according to the law, were allowed only to administer a maximum of forty stripes (Deut. 25:3), so they flogged him thirty-nine times to ensure that they did not break the law.

According to the Mishnah, if a person is appraised as being unable to bear forty stripes, he may receive eighteen stripes as his full punishment. Also, the flogging was administered by tying the hands of the guilty person to a pole, after which a synagogue official would tear off or rip open his clothing, exposing his back and chest. A stone would be placed behind the criminal upon which the synagogue official stood, holding the whip folded over twice to make four whip strands. A third of the stripes were administered to the chest, while the other two thirds were divided equally among the backs of the two shoulders. The official struck with all his might while the criminal was bowed down, not sitting or standing. No more than one such flogging was permitted, except for extremely insolent criminals.<sup>488</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Do you see that he nowhere glories of miracles, but of his persecutions and his trials? ... on every side he found trouble and disturbance, from friends

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<sup>485</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis (46–67)* 55.10–11 (FOTC 87:112–113).

<sup>486</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 1: p. 20.

<sup>487</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Galatians* Homily 1 (NPNF I/13:9).

<sup>488</sup> *Mishnah*, Maccoth, 3.11–13.

and from strangers. This is the special mark of an Apostle, by these things is the Gospel woven.”<sup>489</sup>

**Sixth. Many Trials.** “Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep” (2 Cor 11:25). He was beaten with rods according to Roman law in Philippi and on two other occasions in different places. He was stoned in Lystra (Acts 14:19), was shipwrecked, and wound up in the deep (perhaps referring to his imprisonment in an inner cell for a night and a day).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Men marvel at Isaac for many things, chiefly his patience. For he dug wells (Gen. 26:18) and when he was evicted from his possessions, he did not quarrel but allowed his wells to be stopped and always moved to another place, not mustering his forces against his enemy but quitting and leaving his possessions until they satisfied their desire for injustice. Paul, when he saw not just his wells filled with earth, but his body assailed by stones, did not quit like this man, but went after those that pelted him and strove to lead them to heaven. The more the well was choked up the more he gushed forth, bursting into more rivers of endurance.”<sup>490</sup>

The apostle also says, “in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren” (2 Cor. 11:25). He speaks here of his journeys of preaching and care for churches. When he says, “in perils of waters,” it could be understood from the Greek word *potamos* (ποταμός) that these were rivers. **Ambrosiaster** says that the apostle was in danger of the rivers in winter when rain would cause the rivers to flood and break their banks.

When he says, “in perils of robbers,” he is most likely referring to robbers and bandits; but being poor and owning nothing, he was not harmed in any way, but was nonetheless in great danger. When he says, “in perils of my own countrymen,” he is referring to the Jews who viewed him as the most dangerous apostate from the faith and opponent of the law of Moses, so much so that they plotted to kill him (Acts 23:12). When he says, “in perils of the Gentiles,” he is referring to those among whom he preached.

When he says, “perils in the city,” he is referring to the various plots that were hatched against him, especially in Jerusalem, Ephesus, and Damascus. When he says, “perils in the wilderness,” he is referring to the deserts he needed to cross as he traveled from one city to another, while being in danger of bandits, wild beasts, biting cold by night, extreme heat by day, and possibly also hunger and thirst. When he says, “perils in the sea,” he is referring to pirates as well as fierce storms. When there is a danger of shipwreck, the soldiers kill all the

<sup>489</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 25 (NPNF I/12:396).

<sup>490</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 1: p. 19.

prisoners on the ship lest they swim away and escape. However, when he was a prisoner in such a situation, the captain carried out everything he said (Acts 27:42–44).

Finally, when he says, “perils among false brethren,” he is referring to those who appeared to believe in Christ and joined the church, not to build the Church but to destroy her, and that they may find fault with the apostle Paul and so cause a revolt in the church of Corinth against him. He also suffered from those who left the faith.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “All men you say, admire Job. And very properly so. For he fought a great fight and can stand comparison with Paul for his patience, his purity of life, his testimony to God, his courageous struggle with the devil, the victory in which his struggle ended. But Paul’s struggle lasted not just a matter of months, but many years; he was constantly running into the mouth of the lion, wrestling with countless temptations, and proved more resilient than any rock throughout. He was reviled not just by three or four friends, but by all the infidel false brethren, calumniated, spat upon and reviled.”<sup>491</sup>

“The fact that in the excess of his zeal he did not feel the pains involved in being virtuous is not the only marvelous thing about him. There is also the fact that he had no ulterior motive in his virtue. We are reluctant to endure pains to acquire virtue even when rewards are on offer, but he lovingly embraced it even without rewards and endured with all meekness whatever seemed to stand in the way of virtue. He did not chafe at bodily weakness, or pressure of engagements, or the tyranny of habit, or anything else. Yet his responsibilities exceeded those of generals or earthly kings. Nonetheless he increased daily in virtue; increasing the threats of danger only served to increase his zeal. He tells us as much in the words, ‘forgetting what is behind, I strain to what is before’ (Phil. 3:13).”<sup>492</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “There are, therefore, some who hold the honorable office of shepherds in order that they may provide for the flock of Christ; others occupy that position that they may enjoy the temporal honors and secular advantages connected with the office. It must happen that these two kinds of shepherds, some dying, others succeeding them, should continue in the Catholic Church even to the end of time, and the judgment of the Lord. If, then, in the times of the apostles there were men such that Paul, grieved by their conduct, enumerates among his trials, perils among false brethren, and yet he did not haughtily cast them out, but patiently bore with them, how much more must such arise in our times, since the Lord most plainly says concerning this age which is drawing to a close, that because iniquity shall abound the love of many shall grow cold (Matt. 24:12–13). The word which follows, however, ought to console and exhort us, for He adds, ‘He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved.’”<sup>493</sup> And, “What great complaints the Apostle Paul makes of

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<sup>491</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 1: p. 20.

<sup>492</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 2: p. 30.

<sup>493</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 208.2 (NPNF I/1:558).



false brethren! (2 Cor. 11:23–27). Yet he was not defiled by their physical companionship, because he was set apart by the distinction of a pure heart.”<sup>494</sup>

St. Augustine observes that in refuting the false apostles, the apostle Paul employs wisdom and eloquence, even though he says, “I speak as a fool”: “But wisdom is his guide, eloquence his attendant; he follows the first, the second follows him, and yet he does not spurn it when it comes after him.”<sup>495</sup>

**Seventh. The hardships which he voluntarily accepted.** “In weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness” (2 Cor. 11:27). Hardship was his constant companion wherever he went. The apostle Paul spent many sleepless nights: sometimes voluntarily, praying for the service, evangelists, and preachers; at other times involuntarily, in times of persecution. The apostle suffered cold weather when he was shipwrecked on the island of Malta and the people had to rescue him (Acts 28:1–10).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “You say: John the Baptist ate locusts and wild honey (Matt. 3:4). As for Paul, even though he lived in the world and not in the desert, he did not eat locusts or wild honey but was content with simpler and more ascetic food, ignoring even the necessities because of his zeal.”<sup>496</sup>

**1039. What does the apostle mean when he says, “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus” (2 Cor. 4:10)?**

**St. John Chrysostom** comments saying, “You have not yet submitted to death; your loss has extended to money, to reputation, to being driven from place to place. Christ however shed His blood for you, while you have not [done it] for yourselves. He contended for the Truth even unto death fighting for you; while you have not yet entered upon dangers that threaten death,”<sup>497</sup> and, “As he bids one become, as it were, dead unto the world;—and this deadness harms not at all, but rather profits, being made a cause of life:—so also he bids him become foolish unto this world, introducing to us hereby the true wisdom. Now he becomes a fool unto the world, who slights the wisdom from without, and is persuaded that it contributes nothing towards his comprehension of the faith.”<sup>498</sup>

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “But for the rest, what else in the world than a battle against the devil that is daily carried on, than a struggle against his darts and weapons in constant conflicts? Our warfare is with avarice, with immodesty, with anger, with pride; our diligent and toilsome wrestle with carnal lusts, and with the enticements of the world. The mind of man besieged and in every quarter invested with the onsets of the devil, and scarcely

<sup>494</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume II (83–130)* 108 (FOTC 18:222).

<sup>495</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 4.7.12 (NPNF I/2:578).

<sup>496</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 1: pp. 24.

<sup>497</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* 29.1 (NPNF I/14:499).

<sup>498</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 10.2 (NPNF I/12:54).

in each point the mind is able to defend the attack or resist it. If he overcomes the love of money, lust springs up. If lust is overcome, pride takes its place. If pride is despised, anger exasperates, pride puffs up, wine-bibbing entices, envy breaks concord, and jealousy cuts friendship ... So many persecutions the soul suffers daily, with so many risks is the heart wearied, and yet it delights to abide here long among the devil's weapons, although it should rather be our craving and wish to hasten to Christ by the aid of a quicker death; as He Himself instructs us, and says, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, That you shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and you shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy' (John 16:20). Who would not desire to be without sadness? who would not hasten to attain to joy? But when our sadness shall be turned into joy, the Lord Himself again declares, when He says, 'I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice; and your joy no man shall take from you' (John 16:22). Since, therefore, to see Christ is to rejoice, and we cannot have joy unless when we shall see Christ, what blindness of mind or what folly is it to love the world's afflictions, and punishments, and tears, and not rather to hasten to the joy which can never be taken away!"<sup>499</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, "What indeed is death but the burial of vices and the awakening of virtues? For this reason 'may my soul depart among the souls of the righteous,' that is, 'may it be buried together with them' (Num. 23:10 LXX; cf. Col. 2.12), that it may lay down its sins and take up the grace of the just, who 'bear about the dying of Christ in their body' (2 Cor. 4:10) and soul."<sup>500</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, "He came down into our deadness in order that, He having died to sin, we (2 Cor. 4:10), bearing about in our body the dying of Jesus. might then receive that life of His which is for evermore. For those who always carry about in their body the dying of Jesus shall obtain the life of Jesus also, manifested in their bodies."<sup>501</sup> He also says, "If any one who is a man mortifies the lusts of manhood, putting to death by the spirit the deeds of the body, and 'always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus' (2 Cor. 4:10), to such a degree that he has the condition of the little child who has not tasted sensual pleasures, and has had no conception of the impulses of manhood, then such an one is converted, and has become as the little children."<sup>502</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, "Now it is placed on a candlestick by him who subordinates his body to the service of God, so that the preaching of the truth is the higher, and the serving of the body the lower; yet by means even of the service of the body the doctrine shines more conspicuously, inasmuch as it is insinuated into those who learn by means of bodily functions, *i.e.* by means of the voice and tongue, and the other movements of the body in good works. The apostle therefore puts his candle on a candlestick, when he says, 'So fight I, not as one that beats the air; but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection, lest

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<sup>499</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 7: On the Mortality* 4–5 (ANF 5:470) amended.

<sup>500</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Death as Good* 4.15 (FOTC 65:81–82).

<sup>501</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* 1.35 (ANF 9:316).

<sup>502</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on Matthew* 13.16 (ANF 9:484).

that by any means, when I preach to others, I myself should be found a castaway' (1 Cor. 9:26–27)."<sup>503</sup>

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says:

“For those who have really become true followers of Christ our Savior, crucify their flesh, and put it to death, by being constantly engaged in labors and struggles unto piety, and by mortifying its natural desire.”<sup>504</sup>

“For in Him we all have our being, inasmuch as He manifested Himself as Man. In order that He might mortify the *members, which are upon the earth* (Col. 3:5), that is, the affections of the flesh, and might quench *the law of sin* (Rom. 7:23) that holds sway in our members, and also that He might sanctify our nature, and prove Himself our Pattern and Guide in the path to piety, and that the revelation of the truth according to knowledge, and of a way of life beyond possibility of error might be complete—all this Christ, when He became Man, accomplished.”<sup>505</sup>

“[They] have mortified their *members, which are upon the earth* (Col. 3:5), and regarded only those things which are not displeasing to the Divine law; rather He uses the word *name* instead of *glory*, for they who reign with Christ will be enviable and worthy all admiration.”<sup>506</sup>

#### **1040. How is dying with Christ understood in the life of asceticism?**

In the Paradise of the Fathers it says:

“Abba Abraam of the Eastern region said, ‘If a man patiently mortifies his body, he shall attain victory and shall behold the power of the Lord and His wonders.’”

“On one occasion, a certain demoniac came to Scete, and having passed a long time without being healed, he complained about the matter to one of the old men, who made the sign of the Cross over him, and healed him. But the devil was angry, and said to the old man, ‘Now that you have cast me out I will come upon you’; and the old man said to him, ‘Come gladly, and I shall rejoice.’ And the old man passed twelve years with the devil inside him, vexing him, now he used to eat twelve dates each day, and after these years that devil leaped out of him, and departed from him. Now when the old man saw that he was taking to flight, he said to him, ‘To whom do you flee? Continue [with me] longer’; and the devil answered

<sup>503</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.6.17 (NPNF I/6:9) amended.

<sup>504</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 118: p. 548.

<sup>505</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. 2* 10.2 (LFHCC 48:441).

<sup>506</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Vol. 2* 11.7 (LFHCC 48:499).

as said to him, ‘By Jupiter, God has made you useless, O old man; God alone is equal to your strength.’”<sup>507</sup>

**Abba Pishoy** said, “A person can never pray to the Lord with fear [of God] if he does not practice abstinence and the mortification of the self, and it is impossible for a person to purify his heart without abstinence and austerity. But if he perseveres in abstinence, the Lord grants him fear and purity of heart, and he is filled with the graces of the Lord.”

“A brother asked **Abba Poemen**, ‘Does fornication war against you also, the elders, as it does against us today?’ Abba Poemen answered, ‘Yes, my son, but hunger and thirst do not allow us to think about fornication. We watch the sun until the moment it sets so that we may eat our little bread and drink our small portion of water. In the past, we would eat honey instead of bread and honeycomb instead of water, because the mortification of the self changes the bread in our mouths to honey and the water to honeycomb. Even though we did not kill the body, we forced it to be content with what was sufficient; nor did we subdue the body excessively, but only to the degree given to us by the Lord.’”

#### **1041. How is dying with Christ understood in the life of preaching and service?**

**St. Augustine** says, “As weak, then, He nourishes the weak, as a hen her chickens, for He likened Himself to a hen: ‘How often, He says to Jerusalem, would I have gathered your children under my wings, as a hen her chickens; but you would not!’ (Matt. 23:37). And you see, brethren, how a hen becomes weak with her chickens ... With her wings drooping, her feathers ruffled, her note hoarse, in all her limbs she becomes so sunken and weak, that, as I have said, even though you do not see her young, yet you perceive her to be a mother. In such manner was Jesus weak, wearied with His journey. His journey is the flesh assumed for us. For how can He, who is present everywhere, have a journey, He who is nowhere absent? ... Jesus was weak in the flesh so that would not become weak; but in His weakness be strong, because what is the weakness of God is stronger than men (1 Cor. 1:25),”<sup>508</sup> and, “If you love, be ready to lose; if you want to possess life in Christ, be not afraid of death for Christ.”<sup>509</sup>

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “To this we answer, that each one of us also who have believed in Christ and loved His Name, if he have left a house shall receive the mansions that are above: and if he have abandoned a father, shall gain that Father Who is in heaven. If he be abandoned by his brethren, yet will Christ admit him to brotherhood with Him. If he leaves a wife, he shall have as the inmate of His house Wisdom who comes down from above, from God. For it is written, ‘Say to Wisdom that she is your sister, and make Understanding your friend’ (Prov. 7:4). By her shall you bring forth beautiful spiritual fruits, by means of which

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<sup>507</sup> *The Paradise of the Fathers, Volume 2*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (Seattle, Washington: St. Nectarios Press, 1984) 1.417: p. 97.

<sup>508</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 15.7 (NPNF I/7:101).

<sup>509</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 51.10 (NPNF I/7:286).

you shall be made a partaker of the hope of the saints, and join the company of the angels. And though you leave your mother, you shall find another incomparably more excellent, even ‘the Jerusalem that is above, which is free, and our mother’ (Gal. 4:26). How are not these things manifold times more than those that were left? ... But he who is counted worthy of these things becomes even in this world illustrious and enviable, being adorned with glory both before God and men. Manifold more therefore are these things than all that is earthly and carnal, and the Giver of them is our common Lord and Savior.”<sup>510</sup>

**St. Athanasius** says, “The blessed Paul wrote to the Corinthians (2 Cor. 4:10) that he always bore in his body the dying of Jesus, not as though he alone should make that boast, but also they and we too, and in this let us be followers of him, my brethren. And let this be the customary boast of all of us at all times. In this David participated, saying in the Psalms, ‘For Your sake we die all the day; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter’ (Ps. 44:22). Now this is becoming in us, especially in the days of the feast, when a commemoration of the death of our Saviour is held. For he who is made like Him in His death, is also diligent in virtuous practices, having mortified his members which are upon the earth (Col. 3:5), and crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts, he lives in the Spirit, and is conformed to the Spirit (Gal. 5:25).”<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>510</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 124: p. 577 amended.

<sup>511</sup> St. Athanasius, *Festal Letters* 7.1 (NPNF II/4:523).



## 12

# Tears in Worship

### 1042. What do the tears of a believer express?

In the Church, tears are associated with worship in the practice of repentance and in the experience of inexpressible spiritual joy, when the soul stands in amazement before the wondrous love of God and His invitation to be in communion with Him through His divine grace working in him. In the Second Watch of the Midnight Hour of the Agpeya, the believer entreats in the spirit of repentance saying, “Give me, O Lord, many fountains of tears, as You gave in the past, the sinful woman. Make me worthy to wash your feet which liberated me from the path of straying ...”<sup>512</sup>

In the Life of St. Arsenius, the teacher of the kings’ children, we learn that when his heart was inflamed with the love of God, he left the worldly wealth and honor he enjoyed as a teacher of kings and set out for the wilderness of Egypt. His tears never ceased to express his rejection of the pleasures of this world as well as his joy at resting in his Savior’s bosom. Although his tears overflowed continually until the moment his soul departed to paradise, he was always smiling. His disciple, Abba Daniel, said about him that he was “always cheerful in the midst of his tears.” His silence, solitude, and asceticism did not stifle him, but rather filled him with joy and produced not emptiness, but fullness. He had a big heart, abundant in love for God and people. This was reflected in his face and expressions, so that his appearance witnessed faithfully to the hidden work of grace within him much more than could any words or sermons.<sup>513</sup>

### 1043. On what occasions, mentioned in the Holy Bible, did the Lord Christ shed tears?

Through His incarnation, the Word of God shared in everything about us — except for sin alone. In becoming a child, He blessed children and called them to Himself, urging us to imitate them saying, “For of such is the Kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 19:14). He fasted to sanctify our fasts; and He prayed, while being Himself the one who receives prayers along with His Father, to sanctify our prayers. He suffered, was crucified, died, was buried, and rose from the dead, so that we could sing with the apostle, “I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20). He ascended to the heavens so that we can truly say, “He raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6). And now, concerning weeping and tears, He wept in order to sanctify the

<sup>512</sup> *Coptic Reader* app translation.

<sup>513</sup> See Monastery of St. Macarius. *Paradise of the Fathers: A Dictionary of the Lives of the Saints, ‘A’* (Arabic) and *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984): pp. 9–19.

tears that we shed as He did. The Holy Bible mentions two occasions on which the Lord Christ wept, which are:

First, He wept over Jerusalem, which opposed divine truth. Our teacher Luke the Evangelist says, “As He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it, saying: ‘If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation’” (Luke 19:41–44).

His tears expressed His desire for the repentance of the people of Jerusalem, even those who worked in the temple. He invites every believer — whether lay or clergy — to pray with tears for all those who reject divine truth and are indifferent to salvation. Thus, the believer prays and weeps in his private room and even on his deathbed, with a spirit of love and not of judgment, for all the fallen of the world. If Sirach teaches us not to be slothful — even in our old age or in sickness — the Lord Christ taught us through His tears to offer love and prayer for all humanity, while we ask for the prayers of others — even those who have departed from the world — because in our weakness we feel the need for others to support us.

And the second occasion on which He wept was when He went to meet the sisters of the dead Lazarus, who had been four days in the tomb, and to raise him from death while his body was still shrouded in graveclothes. He could not bear the sight of the two sisters weeping, so He too wept (John 11:35), revealing the extent of His love for humanity. He shares our emotions. He is wondrous in His love for all the human race in that He cannot bear our tears, but says, “Turn your eyes away from me, for they have overcome me” (Song 6:5).

**St. Augustine** says that the raising of Lazarus from the dead should not so much be a cause wonder, as a cause to rejoice: “Our duty is to rejoice rather than to wonder.”<sup>514</sup> It should not surprise us that He who by His power creates every person and brings them into the world should be able to raise the dead. It should, however, fill us with joy, for He bestows upon us resurrection, and grants us salvation.

The Greek verb translated as “wept” in John 11:35 (δακρύω, *dakruō*: to shed tears) differs from the verb that was used to refer to the weeping of Mary and the multitudes around her in John 11:33 (κλαίω, *klaiō*: to sob, wail aloud). His weeping was not a loud lament as was theirs, but merely the shedding of tears from His eyes. It was a reserved outward expression of His deep emotions and His way of sharing the pain of those who were in pain, before all

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<sup>514</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* Tractate 49.1 (NPNF I/7:270).



the people who did not yet know how to face death. In these tears, the crowd recognized a living witness of His love for Lazarus (John 11:36).

**St. John Chrysostom**<sup>515</sup> believes that everything the Lord Christ did was according to His divine wisdom for the edification of the multitudes by the performance of the miracle. On the one hand, He did not speak to Mary in front of the multitudes what He had spoken to Martha when she met Him alone, about the raising of Lazarus. Had the multitudes — many of whom bore ill will towards Him — heard those words, they might have left Him and returned to Jerusalem, and thus not witnessed the raising of Lazarus. On the other hand, He affirmed His human nature in that moment, so that the multitudes might not be driven away by Him speaking about His divinity. So, He wept in silence and He was troubled and groaned, and asked about the place of the tomb. All of this raised questions in the minds of the Jews, and a curious desire to know just what He would do.

**St. Augustine** says, “The Lord Himself wept for Lazarus, whom He was going to bring back from death; (John 11:19–35) wherein doubtless He by His example permitted, though He did not by any precept enjoin, the shedding of tears over the graves even of those regarding whom we believe that they shall rise again to the true life.”<sup>516</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “The Savior Himself — to show that He possessed true human feeling — mourned for him whom He was about to raise from the dead.”<sup>517</sup>

**St. Ambrose** urges us to entreat Christ to weep over us, saying, “Would that You would vouchsafe to come to this sepulchre of mine, O Lord Jesus, that You would wash me with Your tears, since in my hardened eyes I possess not such tears as to be able to wash away my offence. If You shall weep for me [as for Lazarus] I shall be saved ... You will call me out of the tomb of this body and will say: ‘Come forth,’ that my meditations may not be kept pent up in the narrow limits of this body, but may go forth to Christ, and move in the light, that I may think no more on works of darkness but on works of light ... Call forth, then, Your servant. Although bound with the chain of my sins I have my feet fastened and my hands tied; being now buried in dead thoughts and works, yet at Your call I shall go forth free, and shall be found one of those sitting at Your feast, and Your house shall be filled with precious ointment. If You have vouchsafed to redeem any one, You will preserve him. For it shall be said, ‘See, he was not brought up in the bosom of the Church, nor trained from childhood, but hurried from the judgment-seat, brought away from the vanities of this world, growing accustomed to the singing of the choir instead of the shout of the crier, but he continues in the priesthood not by his own strength, but by the grace of Christ, and sits among the guests at the heavenly table.’ Preserve, O Lord, Your work, guard the gift which You have given even to him who shrank from it. For I knew that I was not worthy to be called a bishop, because I had devoted myself to this world, but by Your grace I am what I am. And I am

<sup>515</sup> See St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 63:1 (NPNF I/14:230–231).

<sup>516</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 263.3 (NPNF I/1:592).

<sup>517</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 60.7 (NPNF II/6:126).

indeed the least of all bishops, and the lowest in merit; yet since I too have undertaken some labour for Your holy Church, watch over this fruit, and let not him whom when lost You did call to the priesthood, to be lost when a priest. And first grant that I may know how with inmost affection to mourn with those who sin; for this is a very great virtue.”<sup>518</sup>

#### **1044. What purposes do weeping and tears serve for God’s mourning people?**

God teaches us about tears and weeping through the lives of believers who mourned, who reveal the purpose of tears to us through their experiences:

**First:** Such examples reveal the characteristics of tears that are acceptable before, and cherished by God; and the characteristics of those tears He rejects.

**Second:** They reveal the characteristics of tears that are pleasing to God. David asks the Lord not to rebuke him in His anger (Ps. 6:1). He does not pray, “Lord, do not rebuke me.” Rather, he says, “Rebuke me but as a father with his son.” Jeremiah, too, says, “O Lord, correct me, but with justice; not in Your anger, lest You bring me to nothing” (Jer. 10:24). David prays that the sorrows that befall him may be as the chastisements of a child and not as the punishment of an outcast. The wrath of the Lord destroys, but His fatherly love repairs, compels, and saves. David asks God to rebuke him in mercy and goodness, and not in His anger, for he upon whom God pours out His anger will perish. God has two rods: one for mercy and the other for His dreadful wrath. St. Paul talks about the latter, saying, “...treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God” (Rom. 2:5).

**Third:** David was a weeping prophet like Jeremiah the prophet. He did not grieve because of external afflictions, but when the burden of sin weighed heavily on his conscience he refused to be comforted,<sup>519</sup> waiting for the mercies of God, the true Physician. He thus cried out to Him saying, “O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger, nor chasten me in Your hot displeasure. Have mercy on me, O Lord, for I am weak; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are troubled ... All night I make my bed swim” (Ps. 6:1–2, 6). This cry is a confession of our weakness and our inability to save our own souls. Our hope for redemption rests in divine mercy.

**Fourth:** The faithful are not ashamed to offer their tears to the Lord openly. Even kings, prophets, women, fornicators — even entire nations like the people of Nineveh and Israel shed tears as a sign of the sincerity of their repentance and love for God.

**Fifth:** The impact of their tears extended to their descendants and became a blessing and a lesson for the people who came after their departure.

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<sup>518</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 2.8.71–73 (NPNF II/10:354) amended.

<sup>519</sup> See Matthew Henry, *Concise Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson, 1997): p. 583.

**Sixth:** Each of these examples teaches us about one or more aspects of the life of tears, that we may learn and seek the life of tears according to what suits our lives, situations, and circumstances.

**Seventh:** We cannot find even one among the great saints who did not need to weep to receive divine grace.

**1045. What do we learn from David the prophet about the potency of those tears that are acceptable before God?**

The life of David the prophet and king and his psalms (as well as the psalms of the other psalmists) reveal God's appreciation and concern for the tears of those who believe in Him, and how He transforms the sorrows of those who weep into joy.

**First:** David tells us that God preserves the tears of His children in a precious bottle (Ps. 56:8). He believes that even as the wicked track the steps of the righteous person in order to plot against him, God also watches the righteous in his flight to save his tears as a down payment for the glory that has been prepared for him.

**Second:** If David, the devout king and prophet, felt the need for repentance with tears, we ought to realize that everyone needs tears of repentance. David was known from his youth to be pure of heart as the words of the Lord show: "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will do all My will" (Acts 13:22). The Holy Bible speaks clearly about his falls so that we may learn that as long as we are in this flesh, we should never trust it: no matter how pure we may have been in the past; nor how old we may be; nor what our rank in the Church or our status in society may be. David did not fall into the sin of adultery in his youth; but sadly, he fell into it when he was old, married, and a king.

**Third:** David, the man of praise, who used to begin and end his day with praises and psalms, took refuge in tears of repentance so that no one — regardless of his prayers, praises, and services — should think that he above falling into sin.

**Fourth:** King David was not ashamed of composing many psalms about repentance. He let everyone know that although he is a king, his tears make his bed swim every night. **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, "Yes, and I know of a Fifth (baptism) also, which is that of tears, and is much more laborious, received by him who washes his bed every night and his couch with tears."<sup>520</sup>

**Fifth:** The life of tears is not something only for monastics and ascetics but something for which every believer should pray.

**Sixth:** What drove David to tears was the feeling that he was a sojourner on earth. He cries out, saying, "Do not be silent at my tears, for I am a stranger with You, a sojourner, as

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<sup>520</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 39.17 (NPNF II/7:358).

all my fathers were” (Ps. 39:12). **St. Augustine** says, “Set me free from my sins, ‘before I go hence’ ... He alluded therefore to that realm of bliss, to the happy country, to the happy home, where the Saints are partakers of eternal Life, and of Truth unchangeable.”<sup>521</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “The saints were ‘strangers and sojourners.’ How and in what way? And where does Abraham confess himself ‘a stranger and a sojourner’? Probably indeed he even himself confessed it ... He built no splendid houses, he enjoyed no luxuries, he had no care about dress, which all are things of this world; but lived in all respects as belonging to the City yonder; he showed hospitality, brotherly love, mercifulness, forbearance, contempt for wealth and for present glory, and for all else.”<sup>522</sup> And, “Let us even now become strangers; that God may ‘not be ashamed of us to be called our God.’ For it is a shame to Him, when He is called the God of the wicked, and He also is ashamed of them; as He is glorified when He is [called the God] of the good and the kind.”<sup>523</sup>

**Seventh:** David’s holy tears increase without end because they express his longing without end for God: “My tears have been my bread day and night, while they continually say to me, ‘Where is your God?’” (Ps. 42:3). **St. Augustine** says, “My tears (he says) have been not bitterness, but ‘my bread.’ Those very tears were sweet unto me: being athirst for that fountain, inasmuch as I was not as yet able to drink of it, I have eagerly made my tears my meat. For he said not, ‘My tears became my drink,’ lest he should seem to have longed for them, as for ‘the water-brooks’: but, still retaining that thirst wherewith I burn, and by which I am hurried away towards the water-brooks, ‘My tears became my meat,’ whilst I am not yet there.”<sup>524</sup>

His tears did not dry up day or night. His daily duties, no matter how important they were, could not distract him from seeking God with tears, nor could the respite of the night pacify this yearning. He was not embarrassed to weep openly with tears during the day, and he took refuge in hidden weeping at night as manifesting the depths of his love for God. The day, here, represents times of joy, while the night represents times of distress and pain.

In pride, arrogance, and ridicule, his enemies challenge him: “Where is your God?” They considered God’s long-suffering to be weakness! They want to quash his hope in God, as though He had left him. They do not realize that He is the master and manager of history. He tarries and is patient, waiting for them to repent and return; or perhaps waiting until the cup of their wickedness is full.

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<sup>521</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 39.22 (NPNF I/8:118–119).

<sup>522</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* Homily 24.4 (NPNF I/14:474).

<sup>523</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* Homily 24.7 (NPNF I/14:475).

<sup>524</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 42 (NPNF I/8:133) amended.

**1046. What does the psalmist mean when he says, “You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure” (Ps. 80:5)?**

We hear the psalmist Asaph saying to God, “You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure” (Ps. 80:5). The eightieth psalm portrays the bitterness of a broken soul whose tears fall on his bread because of the intensity of grief, so that the tears become food or drink for the soul.

**St. Ambrose** believes that tears must be shed by measure; there are certain limits we should not exceed lest these tears become the cause of the soul perishing. St. Paul was afraid that the repentant adulterer would perish from too much sorrow (2 Cor. 2:7). **Origen** says, “we do not forget this precept, where it is said, ‘By what measure you have measured, the same will be meted out to you’ (Matt. 7:2). For we also say to God, ‘You gave us a loaf of tears and you made us drink tears in a full measure’ (Ps. 79:6).”<sup>525</sup> **Anthimus of Jerusalem** says, “Even our bread we eat with weeping, and our cup is filled with tears, as though it were fully measured, meaning that our tears are measured and valued in proportion to our iniquities.”

**St. Augustine** says, “Hear the Apostle: ‘God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able’ (1 Cor. 10:13). The measure is, according to your powers: the measure is, that you be instructed, not that you be crushed.”<sup>526</sup>

**1047. Do tears of longing for God render tears of sorrow in distress unnecessary, and vice versa?**

**St. Didymus the Blind** says, “Since weeping has different meanings, laughing needs to be understood accordingly; for weeping does not have only one meaning, nor does laughing. And since laughing is split in two meanings — sometimes praiseworthy, sometimes reprehensible — even weeping must be seen in this way, so that praiseworthy laughing corresponds to praiseworthy weeping and the same with reprehensible laughing and weeping. Often, thus, a life which is prone more to lust than to the love of God is laughing in such a way that the laughter itself is made into a god. And as some consider their stomachs divine and others consider them mammon, so a third person who loves entertainment and wants to be witty and so on, builds altars for laughter by making it divine so that he sacrifices to it ... There is, however, also a praiseworthy laughter. It is said that God ‘will yet fill your mouth with laughter’ with (of course) praiseworthy laughter. This corresponds to the fruit of the Spirit, which is joy, for, ‘The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace.’ Laughter, therefore, that corresponds with joy is praiseworthy. Any weeping that is opposed to this kind of laughter and to the condition that opposes the joy of the Holy Spirit is reprehensible. That kind of

<sup>525</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Leviticus 1–16* 11.6 (FOTC 83:214).

<sup>526</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 80.4 (NPNF I/8:287).

weeping did not help Jerusalem. (Luke 19:41, 23:28) And why was that so? It is because it did not repent at the time when it should have repented, but after it was too late.”<sup>527</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Paul teaches us that we must not abandon those who have committed a sin unto death, but that we must rather coerce them with the bread of tears and tears to drink, yet so that their sorrow itself be moderated. For this is the meaning of the passage, ‘You have given them tears to drink in large measure’ (Ps. 80:5), that their sorrow itself should have its measure, lest perchance he who is repenting should be consumed by overmuch sorrow, as was said to the Corinthians: ‘What do you want? Shall I come to you with a rod, or in love and a spirit of meekness?’ (1 Cor. 4:21). But even the rod is not severe, since he had read: ‘You shall beat him indeed with a rod, but shall deliver his soul from death’ (Prov. 23:14).”<sup>528</sup>

**1048. What does the psalmist mean when he says, “I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping” (Ps. 102:9)?**

In Psalm 42:3 we saw that David’s holy tears reveal his unceasing hunger and thirst for God, and in Psalm 80:5 we read, “You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure.” This depicts the bitterness of a broken soul whose tears fall on her bread due to the intensity of grief, becoming like food or drink for the soul. Psalm 102:9 depicts mourners who cover their heads and clothes with ashes, so when they come to eat through sheer force of hunger, they find their food contaminated with ashes from their bodies and clothing. The psalmist says that he eats the ashes themselves.

**Anthimus of Jerusalem** believes that the misfortunes mentioned in this psalm refer to the afflictions of the Jews after they crucified Christ. Their livelihood became like the ashes left over from the sacrifices they burned, and their joyful drink was mingled with their tears. Their days became like a shadow, because they served the law that is but a shadow or a sketch of the law of the gospel. They became dry like straw, they became as food for cattle, and fuel for fire. The psalmist became severely emaciated due to anxiety and sleeplessness.

**St. Augustine** says, “For many groan, and I also groan; even for this I groan, because they groan for a wrong cause. That man has lost a piece of money, he groans ... He commits fraud, and rejoices ... For we wish to correct them, we wish to amend them, we wish to reform them, and when we cannot, we groan; and when we groan, we are not separated from them.”<sup>529</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 71.4 (ACCOS 9:221–222).

<sup>528</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 1.13.59 (NPNF II/10:339) amended.

<sup>529</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 102.6 (NPNF I/8:496).

**1049. What does the psalmist mean when he says, “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with Him” (Ps. 126:5–6)?**

The believer stands in astonishment, his heart is filled with heavenly joy, and he feels as if heaven has invaded his heart, or that he has ascended to heaven. Tears flow in his depths not to crush his joy or veil it, but to water it and feed it. Perhaps the heart itself is transformed into a joyful heaven, or a river of tears that irrigates the city of God within. The world’s laughter contradicts tears, but spiritual laughter harmonizes with spiritual tears, working together as though they were two sisters.

Our Christ, the source of true joy, leads us on the path of tears to His heavenly joy. Christ wept over Lazarus, as well as over Jerusalem, and also in the Garden of Gethsemane. He promised us, “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy” (John 16:20). This is the harvest of holy tears. The prophet Jeremiah says, “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, That I might weep day and night” (Jer. 9:1).

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “These tears are streams of water that bring joy to the city of God (Ps. 46:4).” He also says, “Let us sow in tears, that we may reap in joy (Ps. 126:5), let us show ourselves men of Nineveh, not of Sodom (Gen. 19:17, 23). Let us amend our wickedness, lest we be consumed with it; let us listen to the preaching of Jonah, lest we be overwhelmed by fire and brimstone.”<sup>530</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “In the evening weeping shall have place, and in the morning gladness’ (Ps. 29:6). Recall the time of the passion of the Lord, and you will find the meaning. For, in the evening, weeping overwhelmed the disciples of the Lord when they saw Him hanging on the cross; but, in the morning, gladness, when after the Resurrection they ran about with joy, giving each other the good tidings of the appearance of the Lord. Or, perhaps, even in general this time is called evening in which those who have wept blessedly will be consoled when morning comes. ‘Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted’ (Matt. 5:5), ‘Blessed are they who weep, for they shall laugh’ (Luke 6:21). They, therefore, who spend the days of their life, which is already at its consummation and declining toward its setting, in weeping for their sins, these will be glad in that true morning which is approaching. ‘They that sow in tears shall reap in joy’ (Ps. 126:5), of course, in the future.”<sup>531</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “This psalm speaks to those who are determined to proceed on their spiritual journey to God, who helps us in times of sorrow and grief. This world is undoubtedly the valley of tears, in which man sows while weeping. He supports you to remain steadfast in your faith. The seeds are the good deeds for which God created us to do (Eph. 2:10). He planned for us to perform them by the power of His Spirit in the midst of the troubles of this turbulent life. He who learns to do God’s work in this world — this valley of tears and labors

<sup>530</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 16.14 (NPNF II/7:252).

<sup>531</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 14.4 (FOTC 46:219–220).

— rejoices like a hardworking sower who sows the seeds even in the death of winter. Can the cold wind or harsh weather prevent him from laboring? Absolutely not! Thus, it is fitting for us to look forward to the troubles of this life. Amusements are thrown in our way by the wicked, with the intent of turning us away from the good deeds that we are created to do. Hear what the psalmist says: ‘He who goes out weeping ...’ In truth, he finds a reason to weep, just as everyone of us does. Nevertheless, we must walk, practicing the good works of God on our way. How miserable would we be if we were called to labor so hard, only to weep without receiving any fruits for our labor? How miserable would we be if there is no one to wipe away our tears? But we know that the Holy Spirit works so that we can continue to sow in the midst of our tears. Because the Spirit promises us through the psalmist that we shall doubtless come again with rejoicing. We will bear the fruit of our labor as an offering to Him.”<sup>532</sup>

He also says, “These tears nourish the seed of faith in our hearts.” He again says, “What shall we sow? Good works. Works of mercy are our seeds: of which seeds the Apostle says, ‘Let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not’ (Gal. 6:9) ... There is not a wider field on which you can sow than Christ, who has willed that we should sow in Himself. Your soil is the Church; sow as much as you can. But [what if] you have not enough to do this. Have you the will? As what you had would be nothing, if you had not a good will; so do not be despondent, because you have not, if you have a good will. For what do you sow? Mercy. And what will you reap? Peace. Did the Angels say, ‘Peace on earth unto rich men’? No, but, ‘Peace on earth unto men of a good will’ (Luke 2:14). Zacchaeus had a strong will, Zacchaeus had great charity (Luke 19:8).”<sup>533</sup>

St. Augustine sees in the parable of the Good Samaritan — who symbolizes Christ, being a good guardian — a realistic portrait of the believer who was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves, “who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead” (Luke 10:30). The Good Samaritan had compassion on him, took him to an inn (probably in Jerusalem), and took care of him. St. Augustine asks us not to be disturbed should we happen to go down and fall among thieves, for our Christ will carry us and take us up to His holy Church. In our ascension with Him, we will forget all about our wounds and our souls will rejoice, praise, give thanks, and grow spiritually until we rest in the heavenly inn: “Let us not fail amid those troubles to sow our seed. Although we sow in tears, yet shall we reap in joy ... If we have descended, and have been wounded; let us ascend [with the Good Samaritan], let us sing, and make progress, in order that we may arrive [in Jerusalem].”<sup>534</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “We need firstly to toil and strive, and only then to seek rest. After all, you find this happening everywhere, even in things of this life. For this reason, the

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<sup>532</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Homilies on Psalm 2*.

<sup>533</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 126.8 (NPNF I/8:605) amended.

<sup>534</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 126.11 (NPNF I/8:606).



psalmist focuses on these things: sowing and harvesting. Just as the sower needs to expend effort, sweat and tears ... so too the person practicing virtue. Nothing is so unsuited to a person as negligence. Hence, God made this way narrow and constrained — not only the practice of virtue, but even in the things of this life, which He made laborious, and in fact, even more so. I mean, the sower, the builder, the traveler, the carpenter, the artisan — every person who has a mind to gain some profit must labor and exert effort. As seeds need rain, so we need tears; and as the land has need of ploughing and digging, so too the soul needs tribulations in place of the hoe that tills the earth, to clear it of obnoxious weeds, and to soften its hardness ... Soil that is not worked with diligence produces nothing healthy.”<sup>535</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Temporary suffering for the sake of the truth is not to be compared with the delight preserved for those who perform labours of excellence [cf. Rom. 8:18]. As the weeping of the time of sowing is followed by the joys of harvest, so are the labours for the sake of God followed by joy. The bread earned with sweat, delights the workman; labours for the sake of righteousness, the heart that has received the knowledge of Christ.”<sup>536</sup>

**St. Didymus the Blind** says, “When you, therefore, see a soul that is well tilled, that sows with tears and is ready to reap with shouts of joy [Ps. 126:5], then this tilled field has a king, the Logos, who leads, rules, and reigns.”<sup>537</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “Indeed, God’s grace shone on Joseph, even in his boyhood. For he had a dream that when he was binding sheaves with his brothers — so it appeared to him in the vision — his sheaf rose up and stood straight, while the sheaves of his brothers turned and bowed down to his sheaf (Gen. 37:5–8). Now in this the resurrection of the Lord Jesus that was to come was revealed. When they saw Him at Jerusalem, the eleven disciples and all the saints bowed down; when they rise, they will bow down bearing the fruits of their good works, just as it is written, ‘Coming they shall come with joyfulness carrying their sheaves’ (Ps. 126:6). Although his brothers disparaged the reliability of the dream out of their envy, still they expressed his interpretation of it in their own words when they replied, ‘Are you to be our king? Are you to rule over us?’ (Gen. 37:8). For that vision indicated the King who was to come, and before Him all flesh of humankind would bow down with bended knees [cf. Phil. 2:10].”<sup>538</sup>

**Caesarius of Arles** says:

<sup>535</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Psalm 126*.

<sup>536</sup> St. Isaac of Nineveh, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 4 (41): p. 29.

<sup>537</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 145.2 (ACCOS 9:243).

<sup>538</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, 2:191).

“Let no one deceive himself, brethren; there is no time to laugh in this world. I know, indeed, that every man wants to rejoice, but men do not all look for joy in the place where it should be sought.”<sup>539</sup>

“Those that sow in tears shall reap rejoicing: Perhaps someone may say: It is disgraceful to weep, it is hard to endure sadness. If whoever among you says this had eyes of the heart, you would know what great beauty arises from that ugliness. For sadness and tears for sins are just like dung in the fields. Now if you carefully pay attention to this, they seem to produce ugliness, but are shown to bring forth much fruit. Therefore, we ought to notice diligently that our tears are not shed over an earthly loss, but in longing for eternal life.”<sup>540</sup>

“As we consider the condition of our frailty, the abundance of temptations, the creeping in of sins, the opposition of passions, the destructive force of unlawful desires which are always raging against good thoughts, let us ever grieve and groan. Then we may merit to rejoice without end at the time of joy, repose, happiness, and eternal life which will come later.”<sup>541</sup>

#### **1050. What do the Fathers say about holy tears and the tears of the afflicted?**

**First: Tears are a divine gift to those who love holiness.** St. Augustine says, “The holier a man is, and the fuller he is of holy desire, so much the more abundant is the tearfulness of his supplication. Are not these the utterances of a citizen of the heavenly Jerusalem: ‘My tears have become food day and night’ (Ps. 42:3), and ‘All night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch,’ and, ‘My sighs do not cease’ (Ps. 6:6)?”<sup>542</sup> St. John of Thebes says, “The abundance of sorrowful tears is a gift from God, given through the diligence of the entreaties of him who seeks them.”

**Second: He who weeps wisely acquires great joy and eternal glory.** St. Ambrose says, “Whence did he gain that great joy except that he greatly wept, and, as it were, at the price of his tears obtained the grace of future glory for himself.”<sup>543</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “‘You have turned for me my mourning into joy’ (Ps. 30:11). The joy of God is not found in just any soul but, if someone has mourned much and deeply his own sin with loud lamentations and continual weepings, as if he were bewailing his own death, the mourning of such a one is turned into joy ... But the prophets make lamentation for us, summoning us to mourn, in order that, becoming aware from the prophetic words of our own sins, we may bewail our destruction, afflicting our flesh with hardships and toils. By such a person, the mourning garment, which he put on when bewailing his sin, is rent,

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<sup>539</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume III (187-238)* 215.2 (FOTC 66:114).

<sup>540</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume II (81-186)* 162.2 (FOTC 47:380).

<sup>541</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons: Volume II (81-186)* 162.5 (FOTC 47:383).

<sup>542</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.17 (NPNF I/2:436).

<sup>543</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Widows* 6 (NPNF II/10:397).

and the tunic of joy is placed around him and the cloak of salvation, those bright wedding garments, with which, if one is adorned, he will not be cast out from the bridal chamber.”<sup>544</sup>

**Third: Blessed joy is a gift to those who mourn.** The scholar **Origen** says that weeping alone in repentance leads to blessed laughter.<sup>545</sup> **St. John Climacus** says, “He who wends his way in constant mourning according to God does not cease to feast daily.”<sup>546</sup>

**Fourth: Holy tears are heavenly bread.** **St. Macarius the Great** says, “For the tear that is really shed out of much affliction and anguish of heart in the knowledge of the truth, with burning of the inward parts, is indeed a food of the soul, supplied from the heavenly bread, of which Mary pre-eminently partook, when she sat at the feet of the Lord and wept, after the testimony of the Savior Himself. He says: ‘Mary has chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her’ (Luke 10:42). O those precious pearls in the flow of blessed tears! O that immediate and ready hearing!”<sup>547</sup>

**Fifth: Tears lead us to the city of peace.** **St. Macarius the Great** says, “Labor to enter into the holy city, the Jerusalem that is at peace, that is above, above all, where also is Paradise. You have no other way to be admitted to these wonderful and blessed types, unless you pour out tears day and night, like him who says: ‘Every night I wash my bed, and water my couch with my tears’ (Ps. 6:6). You know well that they that sow in tears shall reap in joy. The prophet says boldly, ‘Lord, put my tears in your bottle; are they not in Your book?’ (Ps. 56:8).”<sup>548</sup>

**Sixth: Tears are a source of consolation.** **Anthimus of Jerusalem** says, “You see my tears before your eyes, O You who knows all hidden things, and You have fulfilled your promise: ‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted’ (Matt 5:4).”

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Nothing is sweeter than these tears; sweeter are they than any laughter. They that mourn, know how great consolation it possesses. Let us not think this a thing to be deprecated, but one to be even exceedingly prayed for; not that others may sin, but that, when they sin, we may be heart-broken for them.”<sup>549</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “He who weeps here receives his consolation, for he fears to weep again.” He also says, “Let tears be my portion now, so that my soul may be stripped from her

<sup>544</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 14.7 (FOTC 46:224).

<sup>545</sup> See Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.6 (FOTC 97:233–235).

<sup>546</sup> John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*. Trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 7.37: p. 118.

<sup>547</sup> A. J. Mason, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 25.8: p. 183.

<sup>548</sup> A. J. Mason, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 25.7: p. 182.

<sup>549</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 12 (NPNF I/13:316).

illusions, and my body may be clothed with true health, which is immortality. Let no one say to me: ‘You are happy,’ because whoever says this to me wishes only to mislead me.”<sup>550</sup>

He also says, “A long journey without tears shows no evidence of a desire to return to one’s home. If you desire what you have not, pour out your tears. Tell God, ‘I have laid my tears before your face’ (cf. Ps. 56:8); ‘My tears have been my food day and night’ (Ps. 42:3). They have become my food; I was comforted when I wept, and they nourished me when I was hungry. Who among the righteous was bereft of these tears? He who does not have these tears will not mourn over his sojourn.”

**St. Ambrose** says, “Jeremiah knew that repentance was a great remedy, which he in his Lamentations took up for Jerusalem, and brings forward Jerusalem itself as repenting, when he says: ‘She weeps at night, and her tears are on her cheeks. She has no comforter from all her lovers ... The ways of Zion mourn’ (Lam. 1:2, 4). And even more, he says: ‘For these things I weep; my eye, my eye overflows with water; because the comforter, who should restore my life’ (Lam. 1:16) ... But let those who repent learn how they ought to carry it out, with what zeal, with what affection, with what intention of mind, with what shaking of the inmost bowels, with what conversion of heart: ‘See, O Lord, for I am in distress; my soul is troubled; my heart is overturned within me’ (Lam. 1:20) and again he says: ‘The elders of the daughter of Zion sit on the ground and keep silent; they throw dust on their heads, and gird themselves with sackcloth. The virgins of Jerusalem bow their heads to the ground. My eyes fail with tears, my heart is troubled; my bile is poured on the ground’ (Lam. 2:10–11).”<sup>551</sup>

**Seventh: The inner fountain overflows with holy tears.** Sirach says, “He who pokes his eye will cause tears to fall, and he who pierces a heart reveals its feeling” (Sir. 22:19). In his writings, the scholar **Origen** interprets the eye and the heart here to refer to the inner life. A believer ought to drink from his inner springs, that is, from his discernment and emotions. When the Word of God, through His incarnation, dwelt among us to establish His kingdom within us (Luke 17:21), He directed our gaze to our own depths where we can see Him working within us. He came, not to belittle us, but to honor us by making us one with Him and showing us His exalted works. Origen<sup>552</sup> calls us to “poke” the eye and “pierce” the heart by praying with faith, asking for God’s work within us and to be filled with His blessings as it is written in the Psalms: “Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it” (Ps. 81:10).

In Origen’s discourse on the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer, he asks us to drink living water from our inner springs and wells. He says, “Let us attempt to do also that which wisdom admonishes saying: ‘Drink the waters of your own springs and wells, and let your spring be your own’ (Prov. 5:15, 17). Therefore, you also attempt, O hearer, to have your

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<sup>550</sup> See Youhanna al-Helw (al-Khouri), *A Philosopher’s Thoughts on the Spiritual Life* (Arabic) (Beirut Catholic Press, 1970): pp. 279–281.

<sup>551</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 2.6.45–47 (NPNF II/10:351) amended.

<sup>552</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 4.5 (FOTC 71:266–267).

own well and your own spring, so that you too, when you take up a book of the Scriptures, may begin even from your own understanding to bring forth some meaning, and in accordance with those things which you have learned in the church, you too attempt to drink from the fountain of your own abilities. You have the nature of ‘living water’ within you. There are within you perennial veins and streams flowing with rational understanding, if only they have not been filled with earth and rubbish. But get busy to dig out your earth and to clean out the filth, that is, to remove the idleness of your natural ability and to cast out the inactivity of your heart. For hear what the Scripture says: ‘Prick the eye and it will bring forth a tear; prick the heart and it brings forth understanding’ (Sir. 22:19). You too, therefore, cleanse your natural ability that sometime also you may drink from your own springs and may draw ‘living water’ from your wells. For if you have received the word of God in yourself, if you have accepted ‘the living water’ from Jesus and have accepted it faithfully, ‘a fountain of water springing up into life eternal’ will arise in you, in Jesus Christ himself, our Lord.”<sup>553</sup>

**Eighth: The Lord attends to the tears and cries of those who are oppressed.** Sirach highlights God’s concern for ministering to oppressed groups. The Lord’s ears listen to the supplications, tears, and cries of orphans and widows. “Do not the tears of a widow run down her cheeks as she cries out against him who caused them?” (Sir. 35:15). **Fulgentius of Ruspe** says, “We overcome the adversary if we fight with tears and prayers and continuing humility of heart. It is written that: ‘The prayer of the humble pierces the clouds ... And it will not desist until the Most High responds’ (Sir. 35:21). Therefore, the weeping of the humble contributes greatly to the destruction of carnal concupiscence. The tears which come from compunction of heart both conquer the enemy and gain for us the gift of triumphal happiness.”<sup>554</sup>

**Ninth: Tears prepare our bridal garments.** **St. John Climacus** says, “He who is clothed in blessed and grace-given mourning as in a wedding garment knows the spiritual laughter of the soul.”<sup>555</sup>

**Tenth: Holy tears ought not to inspire pride in us.** **St. Nilus of Sinai** says, “When you shed floods of tears during prayer, do not exalt yourself for this, as though you were above many others. It is that your prayer has received help from above, so that, having zealously confessed your sins, you may incline the Almighty to mercy by your tears.”<sup>556</sup>

**Eleventh: Tears of heavenly wisdom.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “When we entreat a sinning brother, we ought to weep, grieving and groaning; when we exhort any one, and he gives us no heed, but goes on perishing, we ought to weep. These are the tears of heavenly

<sup>553</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Genesis* 12.5 (FOTC 71:183–184).

<sup>554</sup> Fulgentius of Ruspa, *Letters* 4.9 (FOTC 95:337).

<sup>555</sup> St. John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 7.40: p. 118.

<sup>556</sup> Nilus of Sinai, “153 Texts on Prayer” in *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, trans., E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (Faber and Faber Ltd., 1954) 7: p. 130.

wisdom. When however one is in poverty, or bodily disease, or dead, not so; for these are not things worthy of tears.”<sup>557</sup>

**Twelfth: Tears flow from physical eyes, but they are begotten of the soul. St. John Chrysostom** says, “Nothing is sweeter than tearful eyes. For this is the noblest member we have, and the most beautiful, and the soul’s own. And therefore we are so bowed therewith, as though we saw the soul itself lamenting.”<sup>558</sup>

**Thirteenth: We need the Lord to look upon us so that we may shed acceptable tears before Him. St. Ambrose** says, “Look at us, Lord Jesus, so that we learn to weep for our sin.”<sup>559</sup> **St. Augustine** says, “‘Good,’ says he, ‘are the tears which wash away sin. They upon whom the Lord at last turns and looks, bewail. Peter denied Him first, and did not weep, because the Lord had not turned and looked upon him. He denied Him a second time, and still wept not, because the Lord had not even yet turned and looked upon him. The third time also he denied Him, Jesus turned and looked, and then he wept most bitterly’ ... It cannot therefore be said that it was with His bodily eyes that the Lord turned and looked upon him by a visible and apparent admonition. That, then, which is described in the words, ‘The Lord turned and looked upon Peter’ (Luke 22:41), was effected internally; it was wrought in the mind, wrought in the will. In mercy the Lord silently and secretly approached, touched the heart, recalled the memory of the past, with His own internal grace visited Peter, stirred and brought out into external tears the feelings of his inner man. Behold in what manner God is present with His help to our wills and actions; behold how ‘He works in us both to will and to do.’”<sup>560</sup>

**Fourteenth: We need the tears of the Church. St. Ambrose** says, “We see how easily divine mercy is moved by the tears of the widowed mother, especially as she is doubly heart-broken because the child is her only son. The very great crowd of mourners that accompany her show, at the same time, how honoured she is in her widowed state ... She, by her tears has merited the resurrection of the young boy who is her only son.”<sup>561</sup> In this scene, St. Ambrose sees a vivid image of the Church’s motherhood who weeps unceasingly for us, beseeching her Christ to restore her only son by uttering the words of life: “So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother” (Luke 7:15).

St. Ambrose continues, “And if your sins are so heinous that not even your tears can wash them away, then let Mother Church weep for you. She cries out for each of her children, just as a widowed mother would do for her only son. Her heart fills with compassion, she is overcome with a kind of spiritual sorrow that is part of her nature, when she sees her children

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<sup>557</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 12 (NPNF I/13:317).

<sup>558</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 12 (NPNF I/13:317).

<sup>559</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 10.89: p. 341.

<sup>560</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Grace of Christ* 49 (NPNF I/5:233) amended.

<sup>561</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 5.89: p. 146.

driven to their death by deadly vices. We are the very heart of her heart — for there is, too, a spiritual heart. Paul had one, for he says: “*Yes, brother, give me this joy in the Lord. Restore to me my heart in Christ*” (Philem. 20). We are the heart of the Church, for we are members of her body, of her flesh and of her bones. So let her weep, this tender Mother, and let the multitude surround her. Let not only one multitude, but multitudes beyond counting, weep together with this Mother. In that way you will rise, even in death, and you will be set free from your tomb. The pall bearers will stop, and you will begin to speak words of life. All will tremble with fear, for by the example of one, many will be corrected. They will then praise God, who in His kindness has given us such great remedies against death.”<sup>562</sup>

**Fifteenth: Tears and spiritual fruit. St. Macarius the Great** says, “As the rain when it falls upon the earth takes the place of a key in the lock thereof, and opens [it] and brings forth to sight the growth of seeds and roots which are in it, so are the soul and the mind of him that receives and tastes the things that fall from heaven.”<sup>563</sup>

### **1051. Are there certain limits to the tears of sadness we shed over those who have departed?**

The apostle Paul says, “I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thess. 4:13). **St. Aphrahat** says, “a sinner, while he is living, is dead unto God; and a righteous man, though dead, is alive unto God. For such death is a sleep, as David said, *I lay down and slept, and awoke* (Ps. 3:5). Again Isaiah said, *They that sleep in the dust shall awake* (Isa. 26:19). And our Lord said concerning the daughter of the chief of the synagogue, *The damsel is not dead, but sleeping a slumber* (Matt. 9:24). And concerning Lazarus, He said to His disciples:—*Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go to waken him* (John 11:11).”<sup>564</sup> He describes the dead as those who have fallen asleep, because their souls enjoyed resurrection from the dead through their burial with the Lord Christ in baptism, so that death has no authority over them.

Since death is nothing but slumber, we ought not to grieve without hope for those who have fallen asleep, as though they were faithless. The Lord Christ wept when Mary fell at His feet saying, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died!” (John 11:32), and “the Jews said: See how he loved him” (John 11:36). But:

**St. Ambrose** says, “Not all weeping proceeds from unbelief or weakness. Natural grief is one thing, distrustful sadness is another, and there is a very great difference between

<sup>562</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 5.92: p. 147.

<sup>563</sup> *The Paradise of the Fathers, Volume 2*, trans. E. A. Wallis Budge (Seattle, Washington: St. Nectarios Press, 1984) 2.510: p. 254, amended.

<sup>564</sup> St. Aphrahat, *Selected Demonstrations* 8.18 (NPNF II/13:381–382).

longing for what you have lost and lamenting that you have lost it. Not only grief has tears, joy also has tears of its own.”<sup>565</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** wrote to the Church of Parnassus, north of Cappadocia, assuring them that the apostle, with his words, does not mean to deprive us of our feelings towards those who have fallen asleep, but rather warns us against giving in to grief, saying, “I do not mean that we should be insensible to the loss we have suffered, but that we should not succumb to our sorrow.”<sup>566</sup>

Sirach says, “Weep bitterly and lament fervently; do your mourning according to what he deserves for a day or two to avoid slander; then be comforted for your grief. For grief is a cause of death, and a grief-stricken heart will sap your strength. Grief also abides in misery, and the life of a poor man weighs down his heart. Do not give your heart to grief; drive it away, remembering the end of life. Do not forget, for there is no coming back; and you cannot help the dead man by grieving, but will only injure yourself” (Sir. 38:17–21). Bitter weeping, here, refers to weeping with sincere feelings, as opposed to a merely external show of grief in front of others attending the funeral service. This sincerity is better even than lamentation — many benefit from inheriting from the deceased and therefore praise him, but not from the heart.

**St. John Chrysostom** says:

“Let not your soul be enfolded by the tyranny of grief. You are capable of governing your soul; the tempest is not greater than your skill.”

“Do not be depressed, for there is only one thing you ought to fear, and that is sin.”

“Look not, therefore, on the corpse, lying with closed eyes and speechless lips, but on the man that is risen, that has received glory unspeakable and amazing, and direct your thoughts from the present sight to the future hope. But do you miss his society, and therefore lament and mourn? Now is it not unreasonable, that, if you should have given your daughter in marriage, and her husband should take her to a distant country and should there enjoy prosperity, you would not think the circumstance a calamity, but the intelligence of their prosperity would console the sorrow occasioned by her absence; and yet here, while it is not a man, not a fellow servant, but the Lord Himself who has taken your relative, that you should grieve and lament?”<sup>567</sup>

“You may grieve and weep; but give not way to despondency, nor indulge in complaints. Give thanks to God, who has taken your friend, that you have the opportunity of honoring the departed one, and of dismissing him with becoming obsequies. If you sink under depression, you withhold honor from the departed, you displease God who has taken him,

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<sup>565</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.10 (NPNF II/10:162).

<sup>566</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 62 (NPNF II/8:162).

<sup>567</sup> W. W. Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World's Great Sermons* (Kregel Academic & Professional, 1993): p. 131.



and you injure yourself; but if you are grateful, you pay respect to him, you glorify God, and you benefit yourself. Weep, as wept your Master over Lazarus, observing the just limits of sorrow, which it is not proper to pass. Thus also said Paul: ‘I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope’ (1 Thess. 4:13). Grieve, says he, ‘but not as the Greek, who has no hope for a resurrection, who despairs of a future life.’<sup>568</sup>

**1052. Should a believer shed tears for a family, community, or city that has abandoned God?**

God wants every believer to come and lament Zion and weep over her. Perhaps He would say that if our eyes are dry and our hearts have hardened, let us turn for support to those of our brethren who are spiritual, that we may learn to live the life of repentance from their example, and ask them to pray for us. If we can, we should ask all creation to support us in prayer to God who helps us through the abundance of His grace. The prophet Jeremiah says, “Oh, that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people” (Jer. 9:1), and, “Let them make haste and take up a wailing for us, that our eyes may run with tears, and our eyelids gush with water” (Jer. 9:18).

The prophet Jeremiah was wont to humbly seek out hidden places where he would shed tears for the Lord’s flock who had fallen under the captivity of the devil. Their hearts were afflicted with blindness — they did not realize that they were descending into darkness. Jeremiah’s heart was torn with grief for them, and so he says, “But if you will not hear it, my soul will weep in secret for your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly and run down with tears, because the Lord’s flock has been taken captive” (Jer. 13:17).

When **St. Basil** saw how heresies had crept into the hearts of the simple, the springs of his tears burst forth, and he said, “I will weep many days for the people who are being driven to destruction by these vile doctrines. The ears of the simple are being led astray, and have now got used to heretical impiety.”<sup>569</sup> And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “You hills take up wailing, and you mountains lamentation! Let us call the whole creation into sympathy with our evils ... Let us take refuge in the King that is above. Him let us call in to our aid. If we may not obtain the favor of heaven, there is no consolation left for what has befallen us!”<sup>570</sup>

**1053. What were the hidden places where Jeremiah shed tears for God’s fallen flock?**

What are these hidden places but the inner depths of the Lord Christ, the Lover of mankind? The soul that enters these cannot cease to weep for the salvation of the whole

<sup>568</sup> W. W. Wiersbe, *Treasury of the World’s Great Sermons* (Kregel Academic & Professional, 1993): pp. 131–132.

<sup>569</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 243.3 (NPNF II/8:285).

<sup>570</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 2.7 (NPNF I/9:346).

world. The apostle Paul entered these hidden places, and wrote, “For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know that love which I have so abundantly for you” (2 Cor. 2:4).

The scholar **Origen** believes that Jeremiah wept in hidden places because the leaders and rulers hid the prophecies that testify to the Lord Christ, so that the people were left in darkness instead of light. He says, “*But if you will not hear in a hidden way, your soul cries out from the face of insult* (Jer. 13:16–17). Among those who *hear*, some *hear in a hidden way*, others, even if they *hear*, do not *hear in a hidden way*. So what is it to *hear in a hidden way* other than what is said: *But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory?* (1 Cor. 2:7). And again in another place it is said that *most of the works of God are in secret things* (Sir. 16:21). If I *hear* the Law, either I *hear in a hidden way* or I do not *hear in a hidden way*. The Jew does not *hear* the Law *in a hidden way*. Because of this he is circumcised outwardly, for he does not know that *he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision something outward in the flesh* (Rom. 2:28). But he who *hears* of circumcision *in a hidden way* will be circumcised *in secret* (Rom. 2:29).”<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 12.13 (FOTC 97:126).

## 13

### Praise and the Heavenly Mindset

#### 1054. What are the blessings of praising God?

**St. Basil** says, “A psalm implies serenity of soul; it is the author of peace, which calms bewildering and seething thoughts. For, it softens the wrath of the soul, and what is unbridled it chastens. A psalm forms friendships, unites those separated, conciliates those at enmity. Who, indeed, can still consider as an enemy him with whom he has uttered the same prayer to God? So that psalmody, bringing about choral singing, a bond, as it were, toward unity, and joining the people into a harmonious union of one choir, produces also the greatest of blessings, charity. A psalm is a city of refuge from the demons; a means of inducing help from the angels, a weapon in fears by night, a rest from toils by day, a safeguard for infants, an adornment for those at the height of their vigor, a consolation for the elders ... It brightens the feast day; it creates a sorrow which is in accordance with God ... It is a beautiful melody, the voice of the church and the spiritual incense.”<sup>572</sup> He also adds, “Through calm praise the mind enters into a state of joy and calmness.”

#### 1055. Why did the Church Fathers find it important to talk about praise?

Praise occupies a special place in the sermons and writings of many Church Fathers, whether they be pastors or abbots, or even hermits. They desire that all of humanity become a choir of believers, training for heavenly life. Some of the more important factors that impelled them to discuss praise were the following:

- a. The Fathers felt that their primary mission is to preach the heavenly life, following the example of the Lord Christ’s primary mission to transform earth into heaven and humans into angels. So, inner praise is the primary work of the Church collectively, and individually in the life of every believer as a member of the Church.
- b. Theaters in many lands were accustomed to performing obscene songs. Sadly, some Christians were accustomed to leave church gatherings and go to these theaters which were crowded with both pagans and Christians, especially those who were wealthy or who held important positions. Church leaders could not remain silent in the face of this situation, so they contrasted these songs that result in corruption to praises that result in partaking in Christ’s righteousness, emphasizing that there is no agreement between the two.

For example, in his description of the monastic life, **St. John Chrysostom** gave this description:

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<sup>572</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 10.2 (FOTC 46:152–153).

“They rose before sunrise, and began the day by singing a hymn of praise and common prayer under the leadership of the abbot ... Four hours in each day were devoted to prayer and singing.”<sup>573</sup>

He also wrote, “Are you a handicraftsman? As you sit at work, sing psalms. Do you not wish to sing with your mouth? Do this in your heart; a psalm is a great companion. In this case you shall undergo nothing serious, but shall be able to sit in your workshop as in a monastery.”<sup>574</sup>

“His feet were in the stocks, and his hands in the chain; and the prison shook at midnight while they were singing hymns. See you, how His power was perfected in weakness? If Paul had been at large, and had shaken that building, the thing would not have been so wonderful. ‘For this reason,’ He said, ‘remain bound; and the walls shall be shaken on every side, and the prisoners shall be loosed; in order that My power may appear the greater, when through you, confined and in fetters, all that are in bonds shall be loosed.’”<sup>575</sup>

- c. Many think that happiness is to be found in partaking in entertainment, or enjoying pleasant sights, or being immersed in worldly revelries, or listening to songs that stir the emotions and incite dancing with abandon. **St. John Chrysostom** believes — as do many Church Fathers, such as St. Jacob of Sarug — that the human being is a musical being, and that music plays a vital role in our lives, from birth to the last breath we take, regardless of age, position, or education. Here, St. John Chrysostom outlines the role of the spirit of discernment in the life of a true believer: to discern that which is from the Spirit of God, and that which is of the devil. A soul’s attraction to a certain type of music may identify her nature: “In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest” (1 John 3:10).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “[The Psalmist] shows that praising in itself is good and the psalm responsible for many good things: it separates his mind from the earth and gives his soul wings, rendering them light and airborne. Hence Paul also says, ‘Singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord’ (Eph. 5:19) ... it is not sufficient simply to sing for the song to be pleasing to God; rather, there is need also of the singer’s life and prayer and strict observance.”<sup>576</sup>

- d. **St. John Chrysostom** sees praise as the greatest weapon available to a believer in his struggle against Satan, the enemy of goodness. The one who truly praises is the one who arms himself with praise in all circumstances, so that he is granted victories

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<sup>573</sup> *Prolegomena* 4 on St. John Chrysostom, (NPNF I/9:9).

<sup>574</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Instructions to Catechumens* 2.4 (NPNF I/9:168) amended.

<sup>575</sup> St. John Chrysostom. *Homilies on the Statues* 1.16 (NPNF I/9:337).

<sup>576</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Psalms, Volume 2*, trans., Robert Charles Hill (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998) Homily on Psalm 147: p. 350.

without end. Praise in the spirit of heavenly joy and thanksgiving supports the believer to enjoy Christ’s righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

- e. **St. John Chrysostom** advises parents saying, “Teach him [your son] to sing those psalms which are so full of the love of wisdom; as at once concerning chastity, or rather, before all, of not accompanying with the wicked ... When he has been instructed out of the Psalms, he will then know hymns also, as a divine thing. For the Powers above chant hymns.”<sup>577</sup>
- f. The Fathers consider the inner life of thanksgiving to be a person’s acceptable sacrifice of praise before the Lord. **St. John Chrysostom** believes that a fine example of praise is a poor person who gives thanks to God for granting good things to other people so they can share them with the poor: “And this again is made a praise unto them that they gave thanks even for that which is bestowed upon others. ‘For,’ says he, ‘they do honor, not to their own concerns only, but also to those of others, and this although they are in the extremest poverty; which is an evidence of their great virtue. For nothing is so full of envy as the whole race of such as are in poverty. But they are pure from this passion; being so far from feeling pained because of the things ye impart to others.’”<sup>578</sup> He also says, “Let us too therefore continually give thanks, for our own blessings, and for those of others alike ... For this is the thing both to free us from earth, and to remove us into heaven, and to make us angels instead of men. Because they [angels] too form a choir, and give thanks to God for His good things bestowed on us, saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, peace on earth and goodwill towards men’ (Luke 2:14).”<sup>579</sup>
- g. **St. Cyril the Great** tells us that we ought to take the disciples as an example for our own praise: “The disciples praise Christ the Saviour of all, calling Him King and Lord, and the peace of heaven and earth: and let us also praise Him, taking, so to speak, the Psalmist’s harp, and saying; ‘O Lord, how great are your works, O Lord: in wisdom You have made them’ (Ps. 104:24).”<sup>580</sup>

### 1056. How can we offer a praise of thanksgiving in the midst of harsh circumstances?

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For thus beautifully singing praises, he brings rhythm to his soul and leads it, so to speak, from disproportion to proportion, with the result that, due to its steadfast nature, it is not frightened by something, but rather imagines positive things, even possessing a full desire for the future goods. And gaining its composure by the

<sup>577</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* 9 (NPNF I/13:301).

<sup>578</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 20.2 (NPNF I/12:373).

<sup>579</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 25.4 (NPNF I/10:171).

<sup>580</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 130: pp. 601–602, amended.

singing of the phrases, it becomes forgetful of the passions and, while rejoicing, sees in accordance with the mind of Christ, conceiving the most excellent thoughts.”<sup>581</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says:

“Then give thanks to God; then give praise to the one who tested you in the furnace. Speak praise instead of blasphemy ... this is the way that blessed man [Job] expressed himself.”<sup>582</sup>

“This was the way that Job, too, offered sacrifice despite those dreadful afflictions beyond the capacity of nature.”<sup>583</sup>

“Even that of bearing the circumstance nobly; and if instead of using blasphemous words, you were to offer up words of thanksgiving to the Lord, so would evils brought upon you against your will become to you the good deeds of a free choice.”<sup>584</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says:

“O You who are hidden, higher than the exalted ones who carry You.  
Choose me to sing to You among the earthly who are faithful to You.

O You who are eternal, who alone by Himself knows,  
how can my tongue not serve You by singing of Your goodness?

O You who are to be feared, whom the Sun dare not look upon;  
let the mind behold You and be moved by the greatness of glorifying You.

O You who are carried by the cherubim; You of whom the earthly cannot speak,  
speak in me concerning Your mercies.

O You who are great above the ranks of the heavenly hosts,  
reveal to me Your ineffable wonder that I may speak of You.

The mouth is incapable of glorifying You, O You the Most High Lord,  
create for me a new mouth that is fit to praise You.

You are near to those who seek to be joined to You.”

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<sup>581</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *The life of Antony and the letter to Marcellinus* (Paulist Press, 1979) Letter to Marcellinus 29: p. 126.

<sup>582</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Psalms, Volume 2*, trans., Robert Charles Hill (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998) Homily on Psalm 127: p. 180.

<sup>583</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Psalms, Volume 1*, trans., Robert Charles Hill (Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998) Homily on Psalm 50: p. 359.

<sup>584</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 9* (NPNF I/11:400).

**1057. Is there a particular time for praise?**

The Church, as a congregation of praise, arranges a certain order of praise; especially through liturgies, but for every occasion, even those we would consider as sorrowful, such as funerals. For example, I recall that once while the monk Shenouda of the Syrian Monastery (the late Bishop Youannis of Gharbia) was in the hall outside a church in Tanta with priests from the diocese, a funeral procession was entering the church while the priest, the deacons, and the congregation were singing the hymn: “Remember me O Lord when You come into Your kingdom.” On hearing this, he stood up suddenly and joined in singing the hymn while his whole being trembled. As the procession entered the church, he said to the priests who were with him, “Forgive me fathers. As soon as I hear this hymn, especially in a funeral procession, I feel that the gates of paradise are open, and the angels are rejoicing to receive the one who has fallen asleep and who now shares in the Lord’s promise to the right-hand thief: ‘Today you will be with Me in Paradise.’ So I wanted to share in the joy of the angels.”

The Church asks her children to dedicate times for praises, including the praises of the canonical hours (the *Agpeya*). At the same time, she asks her children to praise unceasingly: when they cannot do so with their tongues, then they ought not to stop praising in their hearts. The Church is a congregation of praise, not only during joyful times, but also in the midst of the most difficult tribulations. The book of Acts reveals to us that the Church was born in praise and finds her growth and preaching in praise.

If we go back to the Old Testament, we find that the Israelites found an opportunity to offer the praise of Moses when they crossed the Red Sea (Ex. 15) which the Church cherishes and sings as part of her daily praises to this day. And in the midst of the fiery furnace in the land of captivity, the three saintly youths found an opportunity to offer praises that we still sing today.

**St. Methodius of Olympus** says, “Oh, the comeliness of those who sing of the mysteries of God! Oh, that I also may join in these songs in my prayer ... Shun not, man, a spiritual hymn, nor be ill-disposed to listen to it.”<sup>585</sup>

**1058. Who can teach me to praise the Lord?**

The secret of the joy that fills the soul of **St. Jacob of Sarug** is his faith that God created him to be His harp, played by God Himself. He says, “A harp cannot play itself unless the one bearing it strikes its strings. Otherwise, it remains mute and silent. The harp player moves his fingers skillfully to awaken a sound in them ... The string is the soul. When she is silent and bereft of praise, strike her that she may sing with the voice of glory in great awe. You do not need the praises of those on earth, but the human race needs you to bestow Your glory upon it, O You who are rich.”

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<sup>585</sup> St. Methodius of Olympus, *Concerning Free Will* (ANF 6:356).

### 1059. How do the Fathers understand praise?

**First: The believer praises God forever. St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “O Lord, I will never cease to praise You, even after my death. Whoever lives for You and with You cannot die; the silence of death does not have the power to silence him.” **St. Augustine** says, “The old man has an old song, the new man a new song ... Whoever loves earthly things sings an old song: let him that desires to sing a new song, love the things of eternity. Love itself is new and eternal; therefore is it ever new, because it never grows old.”<sup>586</sup>

**St. Jacob of Sarug** asks the Lord to help him move all his being to praise Him: the mouth, all the senses, pure thoughts, the mind, the heart, and even the feet that carry the body as a chariot that praises God:

“O Son of God, let my mouth be to You as a melodious songbird  
that sings out pure praise to You in great wonder.

Let my songbird be moved to speak of Your praises.

Yet, I know that Your word surpasses all those who speak.

My Lord, I open my mouth to speak, yet I marvel,  
by Your gift, You have opened it to describe You.

Help me to admire You with senses exalted above the normal.

When the mind marvels at You, the mouth You opened will describe You.

May the mind praise You for Your hidden wonders  
that are exalted far above the mind’s understanding.

May the heart praise You with racing heartbeats  
and with pure and upright thoughts like ministering angels.

O my Lord, the conscience offers pure praise to You  
for it sees how glorified You are in Your works.

O my Lord, all the senses praise You: soul, spirit, and body  
for You are to be praised.

The eye praises You for You bestowed on it the beauty  
of every created thing, to see and enjoy.

The ear praises You, into which is poured  
all the beauty of sound that it receives with pleasure.

O my Lord the two hands and the ten fingers praise You  
that move to work on behalf of the entire body.

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<sup>586</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 149.1 (NPNF I/8:677) amended.



The feet that carry the whole body praise You  
as they solemnly convey us like a chariot in all situations.

The sense of smell that experiences every perfume and scent praises You,  
and by them gives pleasure to many.

The mouth that distinguishes sweet from bitter gives thanks to You,  
and knows how to discern all the varieties of foods.

The mouth praises You ...  
for it possesses the words that give thanks on behalf of every body.

The tongue too and the teeth from whence the voice rings loudly  
to praise abundantly with universal voices.

Help the mouth to fulfill all these things on behalf of all the silent senses  
that move the mouth to give thanks.”<sup>587</sup>

**Second: Through praise, we become like the angels. St. Basil** says, “The praise of God is a duty belonging to angels.”<sup>588</sup> **St. Gregory of Nyssa** believes that praise makes us equal to angels in glory.<sup>589</sup> And **St. Augustine** says, “If you desire to praise God continually, then be jealous of the angels’ praises.”

**Third: Praise makes us rich. St. Augustine** highlights our poverty by quoting Job: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord” (Job 1:21). He deems praise to be like precious jewels, saying, “From where do such jewels that praise God originate? Behold a man who seemed to be poor externally [Job], but was rich from within. Could these jewels have come out of his lips had he not borne a hidden treasure in his heart?”<sup>590</sup>

**Fourth: We offer praise with longing** — the heart speaks, even if the tongue is silent. **St. Augustine** says, “he who truly longs, thus sings within his soul, though his tongue be silent: he who does not, however he may resound in human ears, is voiceless to God.”<sup>591</sup>

**Fifth: A holy life is itself a kind of praise to God. St. Augustine** says,

“For now, when we are gathered together in the Church, we praise: when we go forth each to his own business, we seem to cease to praise God. Let a man not cease to live well, and then he ever praises God. You stop praising God when you cease to live well and when

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<sup>587</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 106 On the Psalm: “Praise the Lord with New Praise” (Ps. 96:1; 149:1)

<sup>588</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 13.7 (FOTC 46:209).

<sup>589</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Refutation of the Views of Apolinarius* 25 (FOTC 131:224).

<sup>590</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Ps. 30*, Discourse 4.12.

<sup>591</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 87.1 (NPNF I/8:419).

you go away from what pleases God. When you praise God, praise with your whole selves: let your voice, your life, your deeds, all sing.”<sup>592</sup>

“All that you do, do well, for in so doing, you praise God.”<sup>593</sup>

“There we shall rest and see, see and love, love and praise.”<sup>594</sup>

**St. Jerome** comments on the words of the psalmist: “Let the rivers clap their hands” (Ps. 98:8) saying, “These are the rivers that flow from the fountain of Christ. He is the fountain; we are the rivers; if, indeed, we deserve to be rivers ... the work of the saints is the praise of God. Christ is not praised in word but in works; He does not heed the voice, but the deed.”<sup>595</sup>

**Sixth: We praise God in spirit and truth.** **St. Irenaeus** says, “Let us offer the sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of the lips (Heb. 13:15). Now those oblations are not according to the law, the handwriting of which the Lord took away from the midst by canceling it (Col. 2:14); but they are according to the Spirit, for we must worship God ‘in spirit and in truth’ (John 4:24). And therefore the oblation of the Eucharist is not a carnal one, but spiritual; and in this respect it is pure.”<sup>596</sup>

**Seventh: The heavenly and earthly creations call on us to praise.** **St. Ephrem** says, “The whole creation became mouths to Him, and cried concerning Him. The Magi cried by their offerings! The barren cried with their children, the star of light cried in that air, lo! The Son of the King! The Heavens were opened, the waters were calmed, the Dove glorified Him ... The Angels proclaim Him, the children shout to Him with their Hosannas. These voices above and below proclaim Him and cry aloud.”<sup>597</sup>

### **1060. How did the Church of the New Testament understand worship through praise in the temple?**

The New Testament Church inherited worship through praise from the temple in Jerusalem where there were groups of people whose role it was to offer praises. It is said that the number of harps there was more than four thousand. The Church, the daughter of Zion, imitates David the king and the prophet, the sweet psalmist of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1) and finds joyful depths in the psalms, in the light of the work of Christ — the son of David — on the Cross, in His resurrection, and in His ascension to heaven. The apostle Paul knew the kingdom of God as joy in the Lord (Rom. 14:17).

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<sup>592</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 148.2 (NPNF I/8:673).

<sup>593</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 130.19.

<sup>594</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 22.30 (NPNF I/2:511).

<sup>595</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 25 (FOTC 48:202).

<sup>596</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Fragments on the Lost Writings of Irenaeus* 37 (ANF 1:574).

<sup>597</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on the Nativity of Christ* 4 (NPNF II/13:237).

**1061. Which Church Fathers composed praises and Church songs through the ages?<sup>598</sup>**

In the second century, **St. Clement of Alexandria**'s soul was gripped by love for the heavenly Instructor, the Word of God. He left us a beautiful praise in his book "The Instructor" or *Paedagogus*. **St. Jacob Baradaeus** also collected about a hundred and fifty Syrian praises. In the fourth century, **St. Ephrem the Syrian**, known as the "Harp of the Holy Spirit," enriched the Syrian Church with his profound, biblical, and theological praises. Also in the fourth century, **St. Hilary of Poitiers** was very touched by the Greek praises he heard during his visit to Asia Minor; and upon his return to the Gaul, he began to compose his own theological praises.

It was said of **Bishop Nicetas of Remesiana** that he won over many of the pagans and barbarians in his diocese to the faith through praise. **St. Ambrose** composed praises for the congregation to sing. Among that congregation, **St. Augustine** was deeply influenced by these praises. About the same time, **Prudentius of Spain** composed praises that were even more inspirational than those of St. Ambrose and were used in addition to liturgical prayers.

**1062. What is the role of St. Mary as someone who praises God?**

St. Mary, the daughter of David the psalmist, offers us a wonderful model of praise inspired by the Holy Spirit who came upon her as she conceived the incarnate Word in her womb (Luke 1:46–55):

- a. St. Mary utters her praise after the incarnation: not merely in exquisite literary verses, but as the bursting forth of the joy in her depths for the One who dwelt within her. Therefore, our praise should bear this same spirit and thus reveal the dwelling of the Lord Christ within His Church, both in the soul of those who composed the praises of the Church and in the souls of those who sing them.
- b. She utters her praise after crossing the mountains of Judah and arriving at the house of Zacharias to serve Elizabeth her elderly cousin. Praise is associated with the spirit of practical service. Since through praise we partake of the heavenly work of heavenly beings, we must know that they are not lethargic beings, but are constantly at work, as is appropriate to their nature.
- c. She begins her praise by glorifying her Savior. In all our praises — even when venerating St. Mary and the saints — our eyes must never stray from the cross, so that we may glorify Him who declared His greatness through His divine and exalted practical love.
- d. Her praise bears the spirit of hope and joy: "all generations will call me blessed" (Luke 1:48). Praise is a sacrifice offered to God through hope in the work of His grace which transforms our dust into the stuff of heaven and raises us from corruption to

<sup>598</sup> K. S. Latourette, *A History of Christianity* (Harper & Brothers, 1953): pp. 207–208.

incorruption. Thus, the one who praises is not two-faced, for his praising tongue is in harmony with his elated heart. Praise transforms the soul into a second heaven.

**St. John Cassian** wonders whether the monks who praise God are angels who descended to earth, or humans who ascended to heaven. He wonders, not only because he heard their unceasing praises ring from the north of the land of Egypt to the south, but also because he experienced the way that their hearts were transformed into heaven, for the kingdom of God was within them.<sup>599</sup>

- e. Her praise expresses her rising above pain, for she sang, “He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts” (Luke 1:51). No wonder, then, that we see the apostles Paul and Silas in the deep prison but unconcerned with their wounds. In fact, they sang hymns to God that shook heaven to action. An angel was sent, the foundations of the prison were shaken, their bonds were loosed, and the doors were opened (see Acts 16:23–26). How powerful is this wondrous praise that shook heaven and earth for the sake of the ones who praised, for they offered “a sacrifice of praise” to God in elation!

**Abba Evagrius Ponticus** says, “Pray gently and calmly, sing with understanding and rhythm; then you will soar like a young eagle high in the heavens. Psalmody calms the passions and curbs the uncontrolled impulses in the body; and prayer enables the intellect to activate its own energy ... [Psalmody awakens] the noetic power of the intellect to contemplation of divine knowledge. If you have not yet received the gift of prayer or psalmody, persevere patiently and you will receive it.”<sup>600</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “Be like the grasshopper and make night musical ... Sing with the spirit, but sing with the understanding also. And let your song be that of the psalmist.”<sup>601</sup>

### 1063. Why is David the prophet called “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1)?<sup>602</sup>

There are many reasons ...

**First: It was said of him that he constantly dwelt in the heights.** He experienced the joyful heavenly life; he lived in constant harmony with the praises of the heavenly hosts; and he partook of their heavenly food: “Now these are the last words of David. Thus says David the son of Jesse; thus says the man raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and

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<sup>599</sup> Cf. Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford University Press, 1998): pp. 104–105.

<sup>600</sup> St. Evagrius the Solitary, “On Prayer: One Hundred and Fifty-Three Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 82–83, 86–87: p. 65.

<sup>601</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 22 (NPNF II/6:28).

<sup>602</sup> A selection of quotes from the psalms of David the prophet and from Christians who followed in his spirit.

the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1). “Men ate angels’ food; He sent them food to the full” (Ps. 78:25).

**Second: He was occupied with God’s word,** the source of true joy that impels us to praise. “The Spirit of the Lord spoke by me, and His word was on my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). “My tongue shall speak of Your word, for all Your commandments are righteousness” (Ps. 119:172).

**Third: He was occupied with Christ the Savior.** “My defense is of God, who saves the upright in heart” (Ps. 7:10).

**Fourth: He witnessed before the Gentiles.** “Therefore I will give thanks to You, O Lord, among the Gentiles, and sing praises to Your name” (2 Sam. 22:50).

**Fifth: He rejoiced in the Lord of the despised and the needy.** “The Lord executes righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed” (Ps. 103:6).

**Sixth: He praised Him who hears prayer.** “O you who hear prayer, to You all flesh will come” (Ps. 65:2).

**Seventh: His hope was in the Lord.** “For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth” (Ps. 71:5).

**Eighth: He called us to shout out.** “I will also clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints shall shout aloud for joy” (Ps. 132:16).

**Ninth: He offered a new song.** “Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth” (Ps. 96:1). **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “Praise as David the King taught you; sing a new song each day with discernment. He said, ‘Sing to The Lord a new song’; now take heed and sing every new praise.”<sup>603</sup>

**Tenth: He taught us that each individual person ought to offer praise.** “While I live I will praise the Lord; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being” (Ps. 146:2). But he also called us as an assembly to praise: “But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel” (Ps. 22:3); and the whole world to praise: “Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him” (Ps. 72:11).

**Eleventh: He called the soul to cooperate with the body in praise.** “Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices; my flesh also will rest in hope” (Ps. 16:9).

**Twelfth: He called us early to praise.** “Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn” (Ps. 108:2).

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<sup>603</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 106 On psalms: Sing to the Lord a new song (Psalm 1/96, 1/49)*. See the text of Fr. Paul Bedjan.

**Thirteenth: He taught us to offer praise as an acceptable sacrifice to God.** “I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving” (Ps. 116:17).

**Fourteenth: He taught us the spiritual praise of the Church.** “My praise shall be of You in the great assembly” (Ps. 22:25).

**1064. Why does David call on heavenly beings and those who are silent to praise?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says,

“David who became the songbird of melodious psalms awakens created beings every day to praise.

He stands in the midst, between the earthly and the heavenly, as a conductor standing between two choirs ...

All these matters of which he spoke are exalted and he said them for your sake, that you may praise with discernment.

Like a wise man, he awakens the watchful to praise, he awakens humanity from their slumber ...

Because [the creation] was created in all its variety to serve You, so we are obligated to offer praise as our service.”<sup>604</sup>

**1065. Does the Lord need human praise?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says,

“Your Lord does not ask for your praise because He needs it, but because He wants you to draw near to Him in every situation ...

Thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of fiery hosts are moved to praise without ceasing until the appointed time.

Yet He does need even these, the multitude of holy, sublime, beautiful hosts, full of wonder.”

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<sup>604</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 106 On psalms: Sing to the Lord a new song (Psalm 1/96, 1/49)*. See the text of Fr. Paul Bedjan.

## 14

# Church Hymns<sup>605</sup> and the Heavenly Mindset

### 1066. What is the difference between praises and Church Hymns?

It is difficult to differentiate praise from Church Hymns. Through Church Hymns we offer praise to God; and in our praise we use the ‘language’ of Church Hymns that is sanctified by God. We consider every sacred Church Hymn to be a sacred praise offered to the Lord.

Praise, in its essence, is the communion of believers with the heavenly creation in giving thanks to the Creator of all, and an expression of our faith that He is the Beneficent and Pantocrator. Church Hymns are the musical language of the faithful. We understand that God, the Lover of humanity, does not disdain human cultures, but rather sanctifies what is appropriate in them; and that He calls on the faithful to express their love and gratitude to Him through sacred hymns.

### 1067. What features do praises and Church Hymns have in common?

**First:** If praises and Church Hymns do not originate from the heart, then they cannot be counted as acceptable and sacred worship of the Lord. Instead, they become a kind of boast in a spirit of pride. The singer focuses on performing well and becomes fanatical about the details of the tune, and thus loses his communion with God.

**Second:** Every church has its own culture, but all churches ought to have a spirit of unity by raising their hearts to heaven: congregation and clergy together — from the bishop to the priest to the deacon — in a spirit of humility and love for God and for one another, and in communion with heavenly beings.

**Third:** Praises and Church Hymns should be characterized by a mindset that is both heavenly and scriptural. For this reason, it is the custom of the Orthodox Church in all its liturgies to set passages from Scripture to melodies, while being very careful to ensure that the words are articulated clearly and easily understood, so that everyone can benefit from them. St. Paul says, “I will pray with the spirit, and I will also pray with the understanding. I will sing with the spirit, and I will also sing with the understanding” (1 Cor. 14:15).

**Fourth:** If many heretics — such as the Arians and his followers who denied the divinity of Christ — used hymns to spread their false teachings, the Church also needs to share her

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<sup>605</sup> Editors’ Note: Fr. Tadros uses the Arabic word *alhan* (ألحان) in this section, which literally means melodies or tunes, but in the context of the Coptic Church, refers specifically to the Church’s traditional liturgical hymns and their melodies. Since there is no exact translation in English, in this chapter we have translated *alhan* as the capitalized term ‘Church Hymns’ unless the context required otherwise.

theological doctrines through Church Hymns that guide the chanters and all the congregation to sound faith and the righteous and holy life in the Lord.

**Fifth:** It is fitting for the faithful to offer praise and to chant Church Hymns with reverence even in their homes, keeping in mind that all the heavenly hosts praise God with fear, trembling, and reverence, mingled with elation in their hearts and joy in their souls.

**1068. Why do we cherish Coptic Church Hymns? Is it permissible to translate them into the language understood by the people?**

**First:** Our pride in our Coptic Church Hymns does not mean that we should belittle or ignore the Church Hymns of other traditions, such the Syriac, Armenian, Ethiopian, or others. At the same time, we must consider those faithful who participate in worship, and we must make the effort to translate these Church Hymns into the languages spoken by the local people, as currently happens in the diaspora.

**Second:** The ancient pharaohs believed in a kind of heavenly afterlife in another realm, although this belief was corrupted by some errors. Thus, the children of the pharaohs, the Copts who were attracted to the Christian faith, adopted pharaonic melodies and gave them a deep and heavenly tint. Some people even say that they “baptized” these melodies. Also, some of the Church Fathers eliminated the heresies that troubled the Church through songs and Church Hymns for the congregation that employ expressions that communicate the true faith.

Besides all this, the Copts were inflamed with love for heaven and quiet worship. The large number of vowels in the Coptic language gives it a kind of sweetness and flexibility in hymnology. I recall, for example, that a young man, an army officer, was staying with a non-Christian officer in a tent in the desert of Marsa Matruh. As he was washing his face one morning, he was humming one of the Church Hymns from the Holy Week. His colleague asked him, “What is that beautiful song?” The Christian asked him, “How does it make you feel?” He responded, “It has a sad tune, but it gives peace to whoever hears it.” He then asked the Christian to sing it with words, and the non-Christian felt an amazing peace.

A man in New Jersey told me he had a little boy who had not yet learnt to speak, whom he was taking to the Pascha prayers. After several days, he found him humming the hymn of “Thine is the power” from Holy Week, without being able to pronounce a word of the hymn.

**Third:** We cannot deny that when the early [Coptic] Church spread to Ethiopia it did not force them to adopt the simple musical tradition of the Copts, even if some Ethiopians enjoyed our Coptic Church Hymns. Also, during conferences with our beloved [Christians] of other denominations, some of our bishops and priests liked some hymns from other traditions so much — Syrian tradition, for example — that they began to sing them in their own time and in their private prayers.



**1069. Are rites and Church Hymns necessary in the Church? Do they impact on our salvation and eternity?**

St. John the Beloved recorded in his Revelation the secrets of heaven; its structure and order, and the hymns of the heavenly hosts. This revelation reveals the following:

**First:** Our God is not the author of confusion but of peace (1 Cor. 14:33). That is why the Church, the Bride of Christ, ought to imitate her heavenly Bridegroom and avoid thinking that spiritual worship is equivalent to an absence of order or a lack of organization.

**Second:** The rite of the Church with its various Church Hymns varies according to the occasion. It is like a language that is understood even by those who do not know the language we speak. It plays an educational role in the lives of children, youth, and even philosophers and scientists. For example, many children, after attending church, return to their homes and try to play the metallic lids of kitchen pots as though they were cymbals; while other children rejoice if their parents give them a toy censer. Also, in classes where children learn Church Hymns, we often observe that children who remain silent when they are in the group will sing aloud the hymn they heard upon returning home.

In one of our churches in Pasadena, California, a primary (or elementary) school Sunday School class visited the church. A child of Chinese origin asked the priest of the church, “Why do you put pictures of these people on the iconostasis?” The priest replied, “We believe that those who have passed from this life are alive and are happy in Paradise. We hang these pictures (icons) to always remind us that we too will depart to Paradise one day and share with them in their praises and joy in God.” A few days later, the priest received a letter from one of the children saying, “Since I saw the iconostasis in your church, I no longer fear death, either for myself or for anyone in my family.”

**Third:** A beloved brother from East Brunswick wrote, “The hymns and rites of the Church are powerful and beautiful instruments that make us cling to God and allow us a glimpse of the heavenly life. The Fathers used various musical tunes and rites during the different seasons of the Church — whether feasts or fasts — that allow us to experience the spirituality of the prayers and mysteries of our worship.

“This is especially evident in the rite of Bright Saturday (Apocalypse Night) when the faithful gather together and keep vigil all night by the tomb of Christ, bearing witness to the victory of the Cross over the darkness of the abyss. In the first prayer that the priest chants at the royal door of the sanctuary, next to the tomb, he sings Psalm 151: “I was small among my brothers.” The Church is explaining to her children who are practicing the rites of Bright Sunday that although the appearance of the cross shows Christ’s weakness as He submits Himself to death, it is He who destroyed death. Then the believers stand up and walk in a procession around the church, holding candles to announce that Christ is the light that dispels darkness. Every moment of this night is a living lesson that inflames the hearts of the faithful and strengthens their faith. We proceed from all the stories of salvation (Susanna, the three

youths in the furnace of fire, Daniel in the lions' dens, etc.) to wonderful hymns that proclaim the power and divinity of Christ; like the melody of *Agios Athanatos Nai Nan*, which means, 'Holy Immortal, have mercy on us,' until we reach heaven through the readings and hymns of the Book of Revelation. This is how the Church sets out with her children from the tomb of Good Friday to the heavenly Jerusalem, and the celebrations of the Resurrection."

This is an example of the beauty of the rites, the readings, and the Church Hymns of Bright Saturday. In the chapter on the "Coptic Calendar," I will talk more about Church Hymns, rites, and readings, and how they disclose the meaning behind each occasion that pertains to our salvation, spiritual growth, and the living testimonies to the work of the Holy Trinity for the sake of our eternity.<sup>606</sup>

### 1070. What tunes are used by the Coptic Church in her worship?

There are five tunes that the Church uses in worship:

- a. **The Annual tune.** Used on regular days throughout the year.
- b. **The Hosanna tune [Arabic: *Sha'aniny*].** Used on Palm Sunday when the multitudes, children, and infants welcomed the Lord Christ as He entered Jerusalem. "Hosanna" is a Hebrew word that means "save us." The Lord Christ entered Jerusalem as the Lamb of God who carries the sin of the world, offering Himself as a sacrifice on the cross. It is also used on the Feasts of the Cross.
- c. **The Paschal tune.** Used in Passion Week, it expresses a kind of awe of the crucified and risen Lord who grants the soul peace. The mystery of this tune lies not in asceticism in food and drink, but rather in the desire to repent from sins. Some call it the "Mournful tune" [Arabic: *Hazainy*] but this term was not known to the Church of the first five centuries.
- d. **The Kiahk tune.** Used in the month of Kiahk, in which we remember St. Mary, to whom the Archangel Gabriel announced the incarnation of the Word by the work of the Holy Spirit who would descend upon her and prepare her for the fulfilment of this annunciation. We, too, in the Nativity Fast, proclaim our longing to fix our eyes on His kingdom that is within us (Luke 17:21), yearning for the Word of God to be formed in all humanity, that we may all become a heavenly bride for the heavenly Bridegroom. During this month of Kiahk, the Church proclaims her joy at the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ: this birth that elated the inhabitants of heaven as He revealed to them the mystery of His divine wisdom for the salvation of faithful humans.
- e. **The Joyful Tune.** Used for major and minor feasts of the Lord, as well as during the Holy Fifty Days after the Resurrection, the period from Nayrouz (the Coptic New Year) to the Feast of the Cross, and from the Feast of Nativity (Christmas) to the Feast

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<sup>606</sup> See Deacon Mina Azer's English article on Church Hymns.

of the Circumcision. Our souls exult in the salvific work of the Lord Christ; whether in His birth, transfiguration, resurrection, or ascension to heaven. This work is strongly evident in the lives of the martyrs whom we celebrate from the day of Nayrouz to the glorious Feast of the Cross each year.<sup>607</sup>

**1071. Why are Church Hymns sometimes chanted in an abbreviated short tune and sometimes in a long tune?**

In the early Church, there were no churches in some villages, and many people would attend their nearest church from sunset on Saturday until the morning or dawn of Sunday to participate in the divine liturgy. The faithful would praise throughout their journey from their village to the church in town, and also after evening Vespers until the beginning of Matins in the morning, so that those present would not be distracted with temporal matters. Longer tunes were clearly useful in these circumstances. But the Church arranges worship according to the circumstances of her people.

**1072. Are Church Hymns merely a heritage we preserve?**

The ultimate goal of Church hymns is not the past. Some who claim to preserve the heritage of the Church actually do so in a dead and literalistic way, often without spirituality and without a real purpose. It is quite saddening that a person should consider himself a faithful guardian of Church Hymns while he remains ignorant of their true purpose — the salvation, if possible, of all humanity.

Thus, we ought — especially in liturgies — to take great care that we fulfil the true purpose of praises and Church Hymns:

- a. We saw that God, in His love for humanity, created us to be joyful musicians who, together with those in heaven, share in the joy and praise of God. Here on earth, the believer lives the heavenly life that knows unceasing joy. The psalmist sings, “Rejoice in the Lord, O you righteous! For praise from the upright is beautiful. Praise the Lord with the harp; make melody to Him with an instrument of ten strings. Sing to Him a new song; play skillfully with a shout of joy (Ps. 33:1–3).
- b. The beauty of Church Hymns lies not in the sweetness of the voice or fidelity to the correct musical melody. They are so much more — a flood of true spirituality that carries us irresistibly to a foretaste of heaven. That is why the apostle Paul affirms that we must praise with the spirit and with the mind also (1 Cor. 14:15), lest we utter words without understanding.

**St. John Cassian** says, “For they [Egyptian monastics] do not care about the quantity of verses [that they sing in their prayers], but about the intelligence of the mind;

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<sup>607</sup> Cf. David Arida’s Hymnology.

aiming with all their might at this: ‘I will sing with the spirit: I will sing also with the understanding’ (1 Cor. 14:15). And so they consider it better for ten verses to be sung with understanding and thought than for a whole Psalm to be poured forth with a bewildered mind. And this is sometimes caused by the hurry of the speaker, when, thinking of the character and number of the remaining Psalms to be sung, he takes no pains to make the meaning clear to his hearers, but hastens on to get to the end of the service.’<sup>608</sup>

- c. In his tour of the Egyptian monasteries, St. John Cassian noticed that they take some care not to allow the recitation of the psalms to go on for too long, whether in church assemblies or in the monasteries. This was for the sake of the younger monks.<sup>609</sup>
- d. All Church Hymns are focused on God’s salvific work, even the veneration of the heavenly beings and the saints, and all the commemorations that concern the universal Church, so that all our emotions and feelings may be swallowed up by the eternal love of God.
- e. Like the heavenly hosts, it is not right for a believer to chant a congregational Church Hymn as a solo or with just a small group of people.
- f. We should distinguish profound, spiritual, and theological praises (such as the *Theotokias*) from popular folk hymns.
- g. Praise and prayer should be characterized by a spirit of reverent love, tinged by the fear of the Lord.
- h. Deacons must be servants of the word who are able to connect the singing of hymns to the word of God.
- i. **St. Jacob of Sarug** emphasizes that the believer should praise God with all his being; body, soul, spirit, and mind, so that he may become like a harp with various strings on which the Holy Spirit of God can play the symphony of heavenly love throughout all our lives and to the last breath. As the psalmist says, “I will sing to the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being” (Ps. 104:33).

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says:

“Lord, I will not cease from praising you,  
even after my death.

He who lives for You and by You does not die;  
even the silence of death cannot silence him.

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<sup>608</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 2.11 (NPNF II/11:209).

<sup>609</sup> See St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 2.11 (NPNF II/11:209–10).

Humans are created to praise much,  
and perhaps they remember to praise abundantly every day ...

A person's mouth is perfect, that it may praise the Lord,  
and he who ceases from praise denies [what is beautiful].

So, that is why you have a mouth with which to praise,  
and with which to give thanks, and with which to bless.”<sup>610</sup>

“May my mouth be for you a censer of voices, Son of God,  
And instead of incense (cf. Ps. 141:2), receive praise from one who is weak. ...

May the homilies of your faith be a complete sacrifice:  
Receive them at the temple as an offering! [cf. Ps. 51:18–21]

Rather than sacrifices in psalms, may my tongue honor you,  
And in every hymn, may all thanksgiving be sacrificed to you.”<sup>611</sup>

“You are the One opening mouths closed shut for speech.  
Indeed, who can open his mouth without You?

Once even a donkey spoke that all might know  
that it is easy for You to grant speech even to livestock (Num. 22:28).”<sup>612</sup>

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<sup>610</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homilies* 96 The Beheading of John the Baptist.

<sup>611</sup> *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on Simon Peter, When Our Lord Said, 'Get Behind Me, Satan,'* trans., Adam Carter McCollum (Gorgias Press, 2009) 5–6, 9–13: p. 8.

<sup>612</sup> *Jacob of Sarug's Homily on the Lord's Prayer*, trans., Morgan Reed (Gorgias Press, 2016) 10.1 (19–23): pp. 16–18.



# 15

## The Coptic Church Calendar and Joyful Daily Life in the Lord

### 1073. What is the purpose of the Church calendar?

**First:** In the midst of a life full of trials and tribulations, the message of the Church calendar is for the believer to experience the words spoken by Jeremiah the prophet in the midst of his lamentations: “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning ... ‘The Lord is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘Therefore I hope in Him!’” (Lam. 3:22–24). Every morning, the believer feels that the Holy Spirit of God is our guide and teacher (John 14:26), bearing us up on wings of love and tenderness, and bringing us to our Christ who is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), that we may experience renewed life in Him (2 Cor. 4:16). Every Church celebration, the Church is absorbed with the task of filling our depths with inner joy, whether it is the celebration of a Feast of the Lord that celebrates God’s work with humanity; or the commemoration of a heavenly being or the heavenly hosts or a saint; or a particular fast. The Church invites us to experience God’s work and to taste the heavenly life so that we may sing with the apostle, “[He] made us sit together in the heavenly places” (Eph. 2:6).

**Second:** In essence, each Church celebration is an encounter with the Holy Trinity in which we fulfil our role as children of the heavenly Father (Rom. 8:15), our potential as members of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15), and our sanctification as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). From the start of every new year through to its end, the Church calendar invites us never to cease enjoying a constantly renewed experience of communion with the Holy Trinity, the Lover of all humanity.

**Third:** On every occasion in the Church calendar, **St. Jacob of Sarug** focuses, in the midst of his daily hardships, on hill of Golgotha (Calvary) whence is the “Wedding Feast of Golgotha,” where he is crucified with the heavenly Groom, and rises with Him every day. Thus, he experiences the Lord as the wellspring of inner peace and heavenly joy. This is the role of the Church calendar.

Thus are we called to stand every morning to receive the good things of heaven from the hand of the Lord himself; following the pattern of the practical experience lived by the holy Fathers of the early Church, even those who were thrown into the fiery furnace. Even now, the authentically faithful live this life, and the Church will continue to live it until the day of the Lord’s second coming at the end of all things.

### 1074. What themes run throughout the Church calendar?

**First: Praise.** For every occasion, there are various praises and Church Hymns that lift up the heart to experience the gospel of Christ, to experience the life of heavenly joy, and to discover the theological meaning behind the occasion through which the soul is edified and the image of God in our inner person is nurtured through the Holy Spirit.

**Second: Continuous renewal.** Life in Christ Jesus is called a new creation in the image of the Creator, as the apostle says, “[You] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:10). And of heaven, we read, “Behold, all things have become new” (2 Cor. 5:17; cf. Rev. 21:5). The goal of the Church calendar is to renew the heart daily through the fiery work of the Holy Spirit. Every day, the believer feels as though it is his first time to stand in heaven praising God and learning of His divine mysteries.

**Third: Understanding that our days are the days of the Lord.**<sup>613</sup> In Origen’s commentary on the verse, “So the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua” (Judg. 2:7), he invites us to explore whether our days are the days of Joshua, days of the Lord Jesus<sup>614</sup> — or whether they are days of the devil or days of love for the world. Because the true believer experiences the work of the Holy Trinity, all his days are transformed; indeed, every breath of his life is for the Lord and all his days become days of the Lord. How much more does this apply to Sunday which is actually known as ‘the Lord’s Day,’ or to feast days?

Here we experience the words of the apostle: “Beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). The scholar **Origen** says, “it is necessary to understand that every single one of us proves to himself that he is either in good days or in bad, and proves that he possesses either ‘the days of Jesus,’ that is, the days of the just, or the days of the wicked. For if we comprehend ‘the true light that enlightens every man coming into this world’ (John 1:9) and we offer our souls to it in order to be enlightened, or if ‘the sun of justice’ (Mal. 4:2) rises up within us and ‘illuminates the world’ of our soul, then we also possess the ‘days of Jesus’ Christ, the days of salvation.”<sup>615</sup>

The characteristics of days of the Lord — especially the celebration of feasts and Church occasions — are as follows:

- a. **We experience the vision of Him who is enthroned.** Our perception is always seeking the vision of heaven and fellowship with the heavenly hosts in praise. May our days be days of the Lord, so that our depths may be elevated to heaven.

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<sup>613</sup> See Origen, *Homilies on Judges* 1 (FOTC 119:39ff).

<sup>614</sup> Editor’s Note: in Hebrew and Arabic, the names ‘Joshua’ and ‘Jesus’ are slight variations on the same name.

<sup>615</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Judges* 1 (FOTC 119:39–40).



- b. **Our days are marked by an abundance of great peace**, but evil days destroy peace. The Lord is the King of Peace (cf. Heb. 7:2). When our days become days of the Lord, He fills our depths with His peace, even in the midst of hardships. The scholar **Origen** says, “do you want to learn from the prophet who they are who possess ‘an abundance of peace’? Hear how he says in the Psalms: There is ‘great peace for those who love your name, and there is no stumbling-block for them’ (Ps. 118:165 LXX; 119:165).”<sup>616</sup>
- c. **Our days are marked by great and perpetual light**, but days of evil are marked by a deceptive light. Origen distinguishes between true light and deceptive light as follows:
- i. True light raises the heart to that which is heavenly, inspiring a yearning for heavenly life; but deceptive light binds a person to transitory things of the world such as riches, glory, and honor, deceiving him that such things are permanent.
  - ii. There is no fellowship between Christ and Satan. The believer must choose whether his days will belong to the Lord or to the enemy of good.
  - iii. He whose days are days of the Lord does not find his happiness in transitory pleasures but in bright light.
  - iv. He whose days are days of the Lord, enjoys the divine light of truth, not the light that conveys falsehood.
  - v. Prayer, the encounter with the Lord of Glory, Jesus, is the way to experience the true light.
- d. **Days of the Lord are connected with His word, His wisdom, or the divine commandment.** The hearts of the apostles and spiritual leaders were occupied with helping us to experience the sweetness and effectiveness of the commandment through divine grace, so that we may receive the divine light, be enlightened and taste days of the Lord.
- e. **The days of the Lord prolong the days of the elders.** Origen speaks of the visit of St. Mary to the house of the as yet unborn fetus of John the Baptist [Luke 1:38–45] who nonetheless witnessed to Christ with splendor — though he was just a six-month old fetus — and is thus considered to be greater than the chief priests and priests who did not care to meet the baby Jesus. In the eyes of God, the days of John the fetus are longer than the years lived by those rulers who failed to fulfil their mission as preachers of divine truth. The days of the saints are called long because they are precious days of love. Every breath taken in such a life is priceless. As for the wicked,

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<sup>616</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Judges* 1 (FOTC 119:42).

whose love has grown cold, their days are short, trivial, and fleeting. Of these it was said, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8).

- f. He whose days are days of the Lord **knows the day of salvation through the cross**. All the works of God are great and excellent, but the mystery of their greatness lies in their connection to the Day of Redemption or the Cross.

#### **1075. What is the benefit of the annual Church calendar?**

There is a line from which we must not deviate, neither to the right nor to the left. The Savior clearly declared: “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), and He had previously warned His people in the Old Testament not to deviate from the way to the right or to the left (Deut. 5:32). In every celebration of a Church occasion, if the heart of the believer is not inflamed with love for God and for his brothers and sisters, and with longing for the heavenly life, his celebration cannot be considered as ecclesiastical, scriptural, spiritual, or acceptable to God.

#### **1076. What is the Coptic Church calendar cycle?**

The Church calendar contains different joyful cycles: on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis.

#### **1077. What is the daily Church cycle?**

**St. Basil the Great** emphasizes the importance of the Prayers of the Hours (*Agpeya*) for our spiritual growth and our spiritual joy, and discloses their importance, saying, “None of these hours for prayer should be unobserved by those who have chosen a life devoted to the glory of God and His Christ.”<sup>617</sup> The book of the Acts of the Apostles contains the practice of praying the Prayers of the Hours in the early Church: the Third Hour (Acts 2:1, 5); the Sixth Hour (Acts 10:9); the Ninth Hour (Acts 2:1); and the Midnight Prayer (Acts 16:25). A person may pray the Prayers of the Hours wherever he might be, without anyone being aware that he is doing so. Each of the Hours has a special significance:

- a. **The First Hour (Prime, Morning, or Matins):** At this hour, we remember the resurrection of the Lord Christ, feel its joy each morning, and experience the new life of resurrection and the defeat of death. In this frame of mind, no apparently chance event can cause us fear or anxiety, for we know that nothing can happen except by the will of God or by God allowing it; He who is the Ruler of All, the Lover of all humanity.

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<sup>617</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Q. 37 (FOTC 9:311).

- b. **The Third Hour (Terce):** At this hour, we remember the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church on the day of the Pentecost, so we ask Him to work in our lives: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me” (Ps. 51:10).
- c. **The Sixth Hour (Sext):** At this hour, we remember the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory for our salvation. If the demon of noonday harasses us (with idleness and boredom) we pray that we may be delivered from him (Ps. 90).
- d. **The Ninth Hour (None):** At this hour, we remember the acceptance of the right-hand thief and the death of Christ in the flesh. It is an apostolic tradition, for the apostles Peter and John went to the temple to pray at the time of the ninth hour (Acts 3:1).
- e. **The Eleventh Hour (Sunset, Evening, or Vespers):** At this hour, we remember the taking down of the body of Christ from the cross. We also thank God that we have completed the day in His care, for His gifts, and for all He has done for us and within us, while confessing our failures.
- f. **The Twelfth Hour (Compline or Before Sleeping):** At this hour, we remember the burial of the body of Christ and we also remember that we too must one day fall asleep and depart from this world. We also pray that we may find rest in our sleep without disturbance or terrifying illusions.
- g. **The Midnight Prayer:** We receive this prayer from saints Paul and Silas (Acts 16:5). The psalmist says, “At midnight I will rise to give thanks to You, because of Your righteous judgments” (Ps. 119:62). At this hour, we remember the second coming of Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, on the clouds. Just as we start the day with the joy of the Resurrection, we conclude it at midnight with the joy of encountering the Heavenly Bridegroom. Thus, every day becomes a joyful feast, for we consider the Lord to be our eternal feast.

#### 1078. What is the weekly Church cycle?

On **Sundays**, the believer lives the resurrected life in Christ Jesus, thus sanctifying the whole week.

The Church devotes **Wednesdays** and **Fridays** to fasting in memory of Judas’ betrayal and the crucifixion respectively. The Church calls her children not to be afraid of opponents, traitors, or even of those who would crucify and persecute us, but rather to joyfully consider ourselves as crucified with the Lord of Glory, Jesus our Savior. Fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays may be considered as a preparation for the weekly celebration of the Resurrection (on Sunday).

### **1079. What is the monthly Church cycle?**

Every month is sanctified by our monthly commemoration of St. Mary the Mother of God, the Theotokos, on the 21<sup>st</sup> of each Coptic month. We look up to St. Mary as a living role model for the faithful and the First Citizen of the Church of the Lord Christ, learning from her to live as those who carry the Lord Christ wherever they go; He who establishes His kingdom in our depths.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> of every Coptic month, we commemorate the annunciation, nativity [or Christmas], and resurrection of Christ (except for the months of Tobe and Meshir). With these commemorations, the believer is dissolved into love through his union with the Savior every hour, every day, every week, and every month.

And we commemorate the chief of the army of the Lord, Archangel Michael, every 12<sup>th</sup> day of the Coptic month. Thus, the believer feels that he is a good soldier of our Lord Jesus (2 Tim. 2:3) and that he has joined the ranks of the heavenly powers.

This is the happiness of the believer and his continual joy on a daily, weekly, monthly, and annual basis.

### **1080. What is the annual Church cycle?**

This cycle, in fact, subsumes all the days of the year. We celebrate the major and minor feasts of the Lord, the feasts of the Theotokos, the feasts of saints, the commemorations of the consecration of churches, and the annual fasts. Through all of this, we repeat in our depths the words **St. Athanasius** records in one of his Paschal letters: “‘Our Passover, Christ, is sacrificed’ (1 Cor. 5:7). Henceforth the feast of the Passover is ours.”<sup>618</sup>

### **1081. What are the major feasts of our Lord?**

The feasts that celebrate important events in the life of our Lord can be categorized as major or minor, depending on their role in the salvation offered by the Lord Christ. The major feasts of the Lord are below. Three have set dates in the Coptic calendar while the other four have moveable dates that change each year.

- a. **Annunciation (29<sup>th</sup> Paremhotep / 7<sup>th</sup> April).** The evangelist repeats the word “virgin” to affirm her virginity and declare that the Lord Christ was not born of the seed of man. This the prophet Ezekiel also declares (Ezek. 44:2–3). St. Mary heard the angel say to her, “The Lord is with you,” an expression with a unique meaning when applied to her. She tasted God’s presence on a unique level, for she carried the Word of God in her womb and offered Him her body and blood!

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<sup>618</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Festal Letters* 19.1 (NPNF II/4:544).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “When therefore you are told that the Son of God is Son of David and of Abraham, do not doubt any more that you too, the son of Adam, shall be son of God. For not at random, nor in vain did He abase Himself so greatly, only He was minded to exalt us. Thus He was born after the flesh, that you might be born after the Spirit; He was born of a woman, that you might cease to be the son of a woman.”<sup>619</sup>

- b. **Nativity (or Christmas, 29<sup>th</sup> Kiahk / 7<sup>th</sup> January).** The newborn Baby in the manger was unknown to humanity, yet He was already working to serve humanity:
  - i. He sent an angel in the form of a star to a group of Magi. **St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “They became His evangelists as they journeyed on the road, preaching that a King of the whole world had dawned. Their preaching spread for miles on the road, and they broke the hearts of the kings whose borders they crossed. Truth impelled them to be His preachers.”
  - ii. He opened the gates of heaven and sent a choir of angels praising, to preach to the unknown shepherds.
  - iii. He went to Egypt to meet the unknown Egyptians to make of them a blessed people.
  - iv. He sent the cavalcade of unknown children of Bethlehem to preach to those in Hades that His coming to them was near, when He would free them from darkness and chains.
- c. **Theophany (11<sup>th</sup> Tobe / 19<sup>th</sup> January).** Just as the Lord Christ went down into the Jordan River, so every believer feels that he went down into the Jordan when he was immersed three times in the baptismal font, in the name of the Holy Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He receives adoption and truly becomes a new child born of the Spirit who then develops to enjoy the fullness of his rights as a child of God till he reaches maturity and attains the right to partake of glory with the only begotten Son, Jesus Christ.

The believer sees the gates of heaven open and hears the voice of His heavenly Father announcing that he has become a beloved son and a dwelling place of His joy, for he has become a member of the body of Christ. The heart of the believer is inflamed, longing to cast the whole world under his feet and concern himself with nothing other than being in the bosom of the Father.

- d. **Palm Sunday.** The Lord Christ looked forward to the procession of Palm Sunday for it is the procession of glory through the cross: “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified” (John 12:23). In offering Himself as our paschal lamb for

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<sup>619</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 2.3 (NPNF I/10:10) amended.

the whole world, He liberated the faithful from the bondage of Satan and took them to heaven. The people of the Old Testament looked out from Hades to see the fulfillment of their types and prophecies, and finally the time had come for Him to burst them out of Hades and carry them to Paradise as the spoils of heaven. The disciples looked upon the procession but understood nothing. They fell into a state of great confusion. The chief priests and the Pharisees looked upon the procession and saw only the complete destruction of their standing and personal interests. The crowds looked upon the procession as the beginning of a new era in which one had come who would free them from Roman occupation and restore their temporal glory. And those in heaven looked upon the procession and were astonished by the humility of the incarnate Word of God, the King of heaven and earth, sitting on a colt, and being celebrated by weak men: “what is behind His humility and His love for humanity?”

- e. **Resurrection Sunday.** The resurrection of Christ transformed His crucifixion and death from painful history into an occasion that changed human history, understanding, and aspirations. The rite of Good Friday, in which the melody of the new Pascha predominates, evokes divine consolations. When it concludes, the rite of Bright Saturday begins, which is the natural extension of Good Friday. As we remember the death and burial of the Lord Christ, we see Him descending to Hades to meet all those who died in hope. Imagine the joy of Adam and Eve, of Abraham who received the covenant, of Sarah, of Jacob and his children, of David the prophet, and of all the other prophets! The true nature of their prophecies was revealed to them, and they saw Him who is called “the Desire of All Nations” (Hag. 2:7). They saw Him coming to crush the gates of Hades with His cross and to carry them as holy spoils on His shoulders through the high and everlasting doors!

By His resurrection, Christ destroyed the power of death and freed us from the bondage of the fear of it. **St. Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “He made the world free by the blood of the Saviour; then, again, He has caused the grave to be trodden down by the Saviour’s death, and furnished a way to the heavenly gates free from obstacles to those who are going up.”<sup>620</sup>

- f. **Ascension.** The scene of the Ascension never leaves the eyes of the true believer. Before it, we invite our souls to hasten to take up the harp of the spirit and transform the whole of life in all its circumstances into a never-ending spiritual symphony. Here, the faithful live like a young bride singing of the greatness of her Bridegroom; the soul cooperating with the body and all its powers in experiencing the joy of heaven as she anticipates the day of her eternal wedding.

The second Adam, “the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:47), set out to return the lost jewel to the Father. Now, we no longer hear with the first Adam: “For dust you are,

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<sup>620</sup> St. Athanasius, *Festal Letters* 5.3 (NPNF II/4:518).

and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19), but when we conceal ourselves in the second Adam, we hear, as the scholar **Origen** says, “You are heaven, and to heaven you shall return.”<sup>621</sup>

- g. **Pentecost Sunday.** Some Fathers and commentators find a strong connection between the confusion of languages that occurred after the flood in the days of Noah (Gen. 11:1–9) and the receiving of the gift of speaking in many tongues given to the disciples and apostles. The people of Babel assembled and planned to build a tower, their goal being to challenge God Himself. As for the disciples and those with them in the upper room of Zion, they were in a state of weakness as they waited for the divine promise to be fulfilled through the descent of power from on high. Then they would preach the gospel of salvation and restore humanity, from all nations, peoples, and tongues, to God in love, humility, and submission to His holy will.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “God apportioned languages among the humans, and these same languages He granted to the apostles, His disciples. Without learning or practice, by the Holy Spirit, the disciples uttered all languages. He bestowed this wealth upon the disciples so that they might speak in new tongues without having learned them.”<sup>622</sup>

## 1082. What are the minor feasts of the Lord?

Five of these feasts have set dates in the Coptic calendar while the other two have moveable dates that change each year.

- a. **Circumcision (6<sup>th</sup> Tobe / 14<sup>th</sup> January).** In submission to the Law, the young Jesus was circumcised, and He prayed, fasted, and was devout. In so doing, He endowed the virtue of obedience itself with divine honor, for it became an attribute of the incarnate Creator. Victory in the contest on the field of obedience is now rewarded with participation in one of the virtues of the Lord Christ. That is why the apostle urges children to obey their parents “in the Lord” (Eph. 6:1). The Lord Christ did not need to be circumcised, but He transformed the circumcision of the body into a spiritual circumcision, where the old man in us is crucified in the waters of baptism and we put off his works, and He grants the new resurrected man who can share in His resurrected, glorious, and joyful life. In receiving the ability to be obedient in Christ Jesus, we are enlivened to new life in Him.
- b. **Wedding at Cana of Galilee (13<sup>th</sup> Tobe / 21<sup>st</sup> January).**

<sup>621</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8.2.4 (FOTC 97:78).

<sup>622</sup> Cf. *Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Holy Sunday of the Pentecost*, trans., Thomas Kollamparampil (Gorgias Press, 2010).

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says,

“It was fitting for [the Lord Christ] to begin His miracles at a wedding,  
and in the abode of marriage, to extend a hand to holiness,

He hastened and stood at the door through which the [human] race enters,  
that He might spread instruction to all who come into the world,

He came to betroth the bride of the Light with His crucifixion,  
so He went first to the abode of temporal bride.

He knew well that He would bring about a triumph at the wedding,  
that He might make disciples of all who rested [at the table] through this miracle.

Christ also was the Bridegroom of past generations,  
and He came to betroth the Church of the nations with His sacrifice.

And since His own wedding was still far in the future,  
He took the gift and went to present it like a relative,

He observed the tradition of the bridegroom who invited Him,  
so that when His wedding is held, they would come to Him.

He accepted their invitation so that when He invites them, they also would accept,  
and He sat with them so that they would sit at His table,

Here He showed that the path of marriage is pure,  
and marriage is excellent and good before God.”

- c. **Presentation at the Temple (8<sup>th</sup> Meshir / 15<sup>th</sup> February).** When St. Mary entered the temple carrying the baby Jesus (Luke 2:22–35), it seems that the inner vision of Simeon the Elder was activated, and he saw the angel of the temple rejoicing and praising the Lord, saying, “With Your divinity You fill this temple, and now you enter it incarnated! I rejoice to receive you!” Perhaps Simeon the Elder was overcome by three emotions that shook him to his depths and made his heart cry out:

*I welcome You, who fills heaven and earth, to Your temple. Behold, the angel of the temple with the heavenly hosts and the believers of the Old Testament, are come in procession to celebrate Your entry into Your temple.*

*I welcome You to my heart, Your new home, sanctified by Your Holy Spirit.*

*When I go to your heavenly home, may I find that everyone there welcomes me.*

That is why “he took Him up in his arms and blessed God and said: ‘Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace, According to Your word; For my eyes have seen Your salvation Which You have prepared before the face of all peoples, A light



to bring revelation to the Gentiles, And the glory of Your people Israel” (Luke 2:28–32).

- d. **Covenant Thursday.** Upon the arrival of Covenant Thursday, the soul of the believer is struck with awe, and he yearns to accompany the Savior on this day’s grave journey. It is a journey that bears the appearance of bitterness but is in fact the sweetness of God’s transcendent love. Humanity turned its attention to eliminating Him who, in their view, had robbed the whole world of Jewish leadership and taken it for Himself. What did our Savior offer to us on this day?

**First:** He came to us asking for us to give Him our defiled feet so that He may wash and purify them. In great shame, we give them, and we also give our hearts to Him; for He is the Forgiver of sins and the Washer of souls. Grant us, O our Savior, to partake of the glory of Your exalted works, so that we may humble ourselves with You, eager to wash the feet of our brothers and sisters; that we may no longer condemn anyone and are no longer troubled even by their opposition to us. Let us desire to bear with their weaknesses and to pray for their salvation and glory.

**Second:** He came to us to offer His body and blood, so that we may abide in Him and He in us. Exalted love of which we have never before heard, nor ever again shall hear! No one else has died to offer his body and blood to those he loves to bind them to him and make them one with him.

When the Savior proclaimed His practical love for the whole world, He also revealed a betrayal against Him from one of His disciples.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says:

“He said to His apostles ‘one of you will betray Me,’  
the meek feared this news from the truthful One.

They were disturbed, distraught, and anxious, looking to each other,  
they trembled and were perplexed, like wretched ones.

Misery rose like smoke from their hearts,  
and the color of their beloved faces changed.

Misery came and encircled them from all sides,  
and they spent the anxiety-filled evening filled in distress.

Yes, in truth, that feast was bitter,  
and hardships piled up one after the other on the disciples.

They heard that their teacher was about to be killed by the Jews and were disturbed, they heard that one would betray Him and were troubled.”<sup>623</sup>

**Third:** Starting on the eve of Good Friday, the Church chants every hour, saying: “My strength and my praise is the Lord, who has become my holy salvation” (see Isa. 12:2). In the Garden of Gethsemane, the Church beholds her Savior in great grief, yet giving strength, praise, and salvation to the faithful. Our Christ speaks of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, and speaks with the Father in His farewell prayer. Here He declares His longing to grant us His Spirit of comfort who will bring us into the bosom of the Father.

He carries us, with Him, into the Garden of Gethsemane, where we confess to Him that we often fall into deep sleep with His disciples, because it is very difficult for us to comprehend the mystery of the love that He declared in His conversation with the Father. Perhaps less than an hour before, He bowed before humanity, longing to wash the feet of their hearts. Here, He is bowing with love before the Father, saying, “not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42). His will and that of His Father are one. In becoming human, He declared His submission and obedience to the Father on behalf of us all.

What is His Father’s will or His will, but that He bow down and bear all the weight of the sins of the whole world? Isaiah the prophet saw Him in the garden more than seven centuries before He physically entered it, and said, “Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this One who is glorious in His apparel, traveling in the greatness of His strength? ... Why is Your apparel red, and Your garments like one who treads in the winepress? ‘I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with Me’” (Isa. 63:1–3).

We come back in shame and say, “We were not able to stay awake with You for one hour during the time of temptation but have mercy on our weak souls and strengthen us, so that through Your Holy Spirit we may share in Your sufferings and in Your crucifixion, so that we may taste the joy of Your resurrection.”

**Fourth:** May our poor souls awaken as You awakened Your disciples in the Garden. We have no desire to flee when the crowds arrest You, but to walk with You even to the cross, and there shall we stand with St. Mary Your mother and St. John the Beloved. We receive Your mother as our mother and are counted as members of the heavenly family.

**Fifth:** We see Him in the midst of the crowd’s uproar caring for the ear of a slave and healing it. Grant us this spirit, O You who are loving!

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<sup>623</sup> St. Jacob od Sarug, *Memre* 53B On the Crucifixion, Part B: The Eve of Tuesday; *Memre* 52 On the Passion of our Savior, His Crucifixion, Burial, and Resurrection (Coptic).

**Finally:** Allow us to accompany You during Your extraordinary trial. Although You are the Judge of all, You do not desire to judge anyone, but to save. Behold, the laypeople and clergy (the Jewish Sanhedrin) dare to bring You to trial as a blasphemer and an evil doer! Yet You remain silent and do not defend yourself (Matt. 26:63), teaching us also to remain silent, even if the whole world stands against us. Let the world judge us, for it is a great honor that we do not deserve, to share in His long-suffering.

Let the crowds cry out: “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” (Luke 23:21). We deserve to be crucified, but He, through His love, allowed them to do so. Truly it is appropriate for us to admit that we are worthy of crucifixion. With every sin we commit we deserve these bitter cries.

**Sixth:** His Holy Spirit carries us to the events of **Good Friday**, revealing them as the divine plan prepared for the Savior to bear our sins, pour out His precious blood, and grant us His righteousness forever. Thus, the events of the cross — witnessed and rejoiced over by the prophets — are the reason for our praise, not only during our struggle here on earth, but also in eternity.

Now, as our souls depart with Him on Good Friday, we stand perplexed before these events. Every hour and even every minute of this day has its own value and presents a wondrous and amazing spectacle.

We see the heavenly ones bewildered by the things that will happen to their fearful Creator at the hands of human beings. They were ready to destroy humanity in moments, but they marveled at His joyful submission to suffering. Nature stopped and watched what was happening and expressed its wrath at the cruelty of human hearts towards You, O our Savior. As for the devil and all his soldiers, they were bewildered. If they left You on earth serving, souls would be drawn to You; and if they crucified You, they would crucify their own authority and power, and destroy themselves. Indeed, You are wonderful in the eyes of heaven, earth, and that which is under the earth!

- e. **Thomas Sunday (The New Sunday).** If the apostle Thomas had indeed held serious doubts, he would have left the disciples altogether and returned to his work from before his discipleship to Christ, and he would not have met them again. According to **St. Jacob of Sarug**, Thomas did not doubt in his heart, but rather thought that it was his right for him, as a disciple of Christ, to witness the risen Lord with the rest of his colleagues, for he would later preach among the nations and say that he had seen for himself the Lord, risen from the dead.
  - i. This encounter is an invitation for every person to enjoy a conversation with the risen Christ.

- ii. Thomas did not leave the disciples but joined himself to them in the spirit of love and unity.
  - iii. The apostle Thomas was the first of the disciples to witness to the lordship and divinity of Christ (John 20:28).
  - iv. The gospel nowhere mentions that Thomas actually touched the wounds, but rather that he declared his faith when he was invited to touch them.
  - v. This encounter is unique in revealing the reality of the Lord's wounds after His resurrection. The Lord's wounds are wounds of glory, not of weakness; thus, the wounds persisted in the resurrected body.
  - vi. The wounds of the Lord are glorious; and our wounds for Him are glorious, showering us with splendor in eternity.
  - vii. His wounds are filled with splendor, that we may be aware that through the fifty days after the Resurrection, we abstain from fasting and prostrations, and we employ the joyful tune in all our prayers, even funerals. Thus, by grace, we ought to share our lives with the Lord; suffering with those who suffer, and for the sake of the salvation of the world in the spirit of hope.
  - viii. The goal of the fast of Lent is to see the Lord. In the fifty days after the Resurrection, the world sees the glory of the Lord, the Savior of the world.
- f. **Entry into the Land of Egypt (24<sup>th</sup> Pashons / 1<sup>st</sup> June).** The souls of the children of Bethlehem departed and the angels carried them in a glorious procession. They are the friends of this wondrous Child, "the desire of all nations" (Hag. 2:7), who sent one of His angels to ask Joseph the Carpenter to take Him with His mother and flee to Egypt (Matt. 2:13). Why?
- i. He fled to Egypt to avoid dying as an unknown infant under Herod, for it must be that He die in public and call all humanity to enjoy the power of His cross, that they may crush the head of the serpent under their feet. He came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for the whole world (John 3:16).
  - ii. He chose arrogant Egypt that had humiliated His people in the past, and went there, carried in the arms of the Virgin, as a swift cloud. The idols of Egypt tottered at His presence and the heart of Egypt melted in its midst, so that He might build His altar in the midst of the land of Egypt and so that Egypt may know Him and hear His voice saying, "Blessed is Egypt My people" (Isa. 19:24). All nations are filled with hope, and rejoice, saying, "If the Savior of the world declared His love for Egypt in this way, how can any person despair of his own salvation?"

- iii. Egypt was a refuge for Abraham and Joseph the righteous, and the land where God's people arose in ages past.
  - iv. He did not come forward to wreak revenge on Herod the treacherous king, but rather, He fled from evil so that the faithful might emulate him.
  - v. By His flight to Egypt, He opened the hearts of many to love Him, so that all those who are suffering or persecuted might resort to Him and find rest in Him.
  - vi. He was not incarnate to show off His miracles, but to show by weakness what is greater than power.
- g. **Transfiguration (13<sup>th</sup> Mesore / 19<sup>th</sup> August).** In the Old Testament, the Lord called Moses to ascend Mount Sinai, to give him the Law. In the New Testament, the Lord called three of His disciples — Peter (representing faith), James the righteous (works), and John the beloved (love) to ascend mount Tabor with Him. This same invitation is addressed to every believer who puts love into action and comes to know the heavenly Bridegroom and His precious dowry.

After Moses had met the Lord and come down from the mountain, the people implored him to cover his face with a veil, for the skin of his face shone brightly (Ex. 34:33). So also did the face of Jesus shine like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light (Matt. 17:2). The hearts of the disciples were aflame with yearning to be in His eternal presence. He revealed to them the truth about Himself, as far as they could bear.

### **1083. Why did Moses and Elijah appear at the Lord's Transfiguration?**

- a. He called Moses from the tomb and Elijah from the heavens to witness the divine wedding contract with humanity on behalf of heaven and earth.
- b. With the appearance of Moses, who had not been allowed to enter the Promised Land, the Lord announced that by His coming, the gates of paradise would be thrown open and the consequences of sin would be removed, so that the faithful might again have a share in eternal glory.
- c. The Lord declares that He has concluded the law and prophecy so that the disciples may receive the preaching of the gospel. The Bridegroom opened up His treasures to be offered by His disciples in His name to humanity.

The disciples heard the conversation between the Savior and the two prophets about the cross, and Simon asked on behalf of all three disciples whether he should make three tabernacles; for their souls were gratified to be in the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom.

But the Father sent a single cloud to overshadow them to assure them that the Church is one and includes the people of God in both Testaments, made as one in the Lord Christ.

May the Lord grant us to walk in faith that works through love, that we may ascend by His Holy Spirit into the presence of the Savior in fellowship with the saints, so that the Lord may reveal to us and to all humanity the splendor of His glory in our hearts, and so that the world may be transformed into an icon of heaven, where love, joy, and peace reign.

#### **1084. What are the feasts of the Theotokos, the Mother of God?**

In addition to the monthly commemoration of the Virgin Mary on the 21<sup>st</sup> of every Coptic month, we celebrate the following feasts:

- a. **The annunciation of her birth (7<sup>th</sup> Mesore / 13<sup>th</sup> August).** On this feast we celebrate the conception of St. Mary, the living ark of the covenant, the dwelling of the Most High, and the second heaven.
- b. **Her birthday (1<sup>st</sup> Pashons / 9<sup>th</sup> May).** Copts usually commemorate the day a saint passed from this world; their martyrdom or departure to paradise — but they insist on honoring St. Mary on her the day of her birth as a joyful day.
- c. **Her entry into the temple (3<sup>rd</sup> Kiahk / 12<sup>th</sup> December).** We learn from the tradition of the Church that St. Mary's life was consecrated to God in fulfillment of her mother's vow, for she had vowed to consecrate her firstborn — whether a son or a daughter — to serve the Lord all the days of his or her life.
- d. **Her departure (21<sup>st</sup> Tobe / 29<sup>th</sup> January).**
- e. **The revealing of the assumption of her body (16<sup>th</sup> Mesore / 22<sup>nd</sup> August).** This feast is preceded by the fifteen-day fast of St. Mary.
- f. **The consecration of the first church in her name at Philippi (21<sup>st</sup> Paone / 28<sup>th</sup> June).** This feast also coincides with the commemoration of the Virgin's miracle of melting iron in the city of Bartus.
- g. **The apparition of the Virgin Mary above her church in Zeitoun (24<sup>th</sup> Paremhotep / 2<sup>nd</sup> April).** This apparition is considered unique among the whole history of Marian apparitions.<sup>624</sup> It began on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1968 and was repeated on most days for hours at a time and for many months. These apparitions appeared above the domes of the Church of St. Mary and were seen by several hundred thousand people, of all ages and positions, Christians and Muslims. Every night, the people would gather around the church, pray, and praise God, waiting to see the dazzling spectacle of St. Mary standing above one of the domes. She was seen kneeling before the cross,

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<sup>624</sup> Jerome Palmer, *Our Lady Returns to Egypt* (Culligan Publications, 1969): p. 1.

or at other times, carrying the baby Jesus. These apparitions were accompanied by the apparition of birds in the form of doves. Among the fruits of these apparitions were the repentance of many and the occurrence of countless miracles.

**1085. What are the feasts of saints?**

- a. Feasts of the Virgin, the Theotokos.
- b. Feasts of the angels, the four incorporeal creatures, and the twenty-four presbyters.
- c. Feast of St. John the Baptist.
- d. Feasts of St. Mark and the Apostles.
- e. Feasts of the martyrs.
- f. The feasts of Patriarchs, the monastic fathers and mothers, and of those who defended the faith.

**1086. Why do we celebrate the consecration of churches?**

The Church and the congregation hold dear the feasts of the consecration of churches, such as the consecration of the Church of St. George the martyr in Lydda (7<sup>th</sup> Hathor / 16<sup>th</sup> November). What is the purpose of these commemorations? And when did our Lord Jesus institute such celebrations?

**First:** God Himself honors His martyrs and saints and He seeks the honor of every believer, saying, “for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Sam. 2:30). When a church, a house of God, is consecrated in the name of one of the martyrs or saints, this may be considered as a kind of honor bestowed by God upon the saint. With each annual commemoration of the consecration of a church, we glorify God as the Lover of humanity, and His saints are blessed with honor according to His divine pleasure and not in the manner of the glory of this world. This is why our celebration of the consecration of a church invites us to focus our inner eyes on denying vain glory and seeking instead the glory that the Lord grants to His beloved.

**Second:** God’s pleasure is to dwell in the midst of His people and in the depths of every believer. Our celebration of the consecration of any church impels us ever more strongly to seek His dwelling always within us and increases our desire for the transformation of every human heart into a temple of the Lord in which dwells the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16).

The Church Fathers never ceased to describe the Church as the community of believers, or to describe the inner person of the believer as a holy heaven, the object of God’s pleasure. **St. Augustine** says, “the Church of God is heaven.”<sup>625</sup>

In **St. John Chrysostom’s** homily on those who did not attend gatherings at church, he says, “For we ought to go out from this place as it were from some sacred shrine, as men who have descended from heaven itself . . . Teach ‘them that are without’ that you have joined the chorus of the Seraphim, that you are ranked as a citizen of the commonwealth above, that you have been enrolled in the choir of Angels, that you have conversed with the Lord, that you have been in the company of Christ.”<sup>626</sup>

**Third:** On these feasts, the faithful should not come empty-handed before the Lord, but rather come to the house of the Lord with some kind of offering. God requested of Moses that he ask every person to bring an offering, each according to the will of his heart (Ex. 35:5); that is, to contribute, as much as one’s charity allows, an offering to be used in building the sanctuary where the Lord dwells among His people: “And this is the offering which you shall take from them: gold, silver, and bronze; blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, and goats’ hair; ram skins dyed red, badger skins, and acacia wood; oil for the light, and spices for the anointing oil and for the sweet incense; onyx stones, and stones to be set in the ephod and in the breastplate” (Ex. 25:3–7). Each of these has a symbolic meaning. For example:

- a. **Gold: Origen**<sup>627</sup> interprets the offering as gold as a symbol of the faith that creates a heaven out of our hearts. Therefore, gold symbolizes heavenly things in the same way that it symbolizes the saints; for they are considered heaven in whose hearts God dwells.
- b. **Silver:** Offering silver is the practice of preaching, for the word of God is like silver refined and purified seven times (Ps. 12:6). If gold symbolizes virginity, then the Fathers see silver as a sign of virtuous marriage.
- c. **Bronze:** Offering bronze symbolizes the virtue of patience in a spirit of strength that defies the thorns of sin. The hands of the Lord Christ appear as rings of gold (Song 5:14) because His deeds are heavenly, but His feet are like fine brass that is refined in a furnace (Rev. 1:15) by which we crush all the thorns of this life and its afflictions without fear.
- d. **Wood** that does not decay:<sup>628</sup> indicates our sincere concern to acquire knowledge and chastity that do not age or decay.
- e. **Fine Linen:** Linen symbolizes the body, and its being woven means that the body is under control and subjection, as the apostle says: “But I discipline my body and bring

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<sup>625</sup> St. Augustine, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 7.6 (NPNF I/6:281).

<sup>626</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homily to Those Who Had Not Attended the Assembly* 4 (NPNF I/9:227) amended.

<sup>627</sup> See Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 9.3 (FOTC 71:340).

<sup>628</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 13.6 (FOTC 71:385).



it into subjection” (1 Cor. 9:27). Every struggle to discipline and control the body in Christ Jesus is an offering of fine woven linen to the house of the Lord.

- f. **Scarlet:** The scarlet cord that saved the life of Rahab and her whole house (Josh. 2:18) symbolizes the blood of the Lord Christ the Savior, and the scarlet thread that we offer to the house of the Lord is our testimony to Him even unto the shedding of our blood: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter” (Rom. 8:36). Scarlet denotes martyrdom or a daily life of dying for the sake of the Lord.
- g. **Purple:** Origen believes that the purple symbolizes the light of love,<sup>629</sup> and fire.<sup>630</sup> A true Christian bears in his heart the fire of the Holy Spirit that lights the way and burns away the thorns that suffocate the soul.
- h. **Goat hair:** Offering goat hair is a symbol of dying to sin (Ex. 35:6, Lev. 4:23). Origen says, “He who offers this animal shows that the disposition to sin is already dead in himself, nor does sin further live or rule in his members.”<sup>631</sup>
- i. **The skins of rams:** If offering goat hair symbolizes dying to sin, then offering the skins of rams symbolizes overcoming anger. Thus, whoever offers rams’ skins declares that anger has died in him and no longer has power over him.

### 1087. What are the communal fasts of the Church?

All fasts, even if some of them bear the names of saints, like every worship, are directed to the Lord Christ. Each fast has a particular purpose that touches some aspect of our salvation and spiritual growth in Christ Jesus. The fasts are:

- a. Wednesdays and Fridays (excepting the fifty days following the Resurrection and if Christmas or Theophany falls on one of these days).
- b. The Paramoun fasts or preparation (before Nativity and Theophany).
- c. The Nativity Fast: forty-three days.
- d. Jonah’s Fast: three days.
- e. Great Lent: fifty-five days.
- f. The Apostles’ Fast, from the day following the Feast of Pentecost until the eve of the Feast of the Apostles.
- g. The fast of the Assumption of the body of the Virgin Mary: fifteen days.

<sup>629</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 9.3 (FOTC 71:340).

<sup>630</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 13.4 (FOTC 71:382).

<sup>631</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Exodus* 13.5 (FOTC 71:383).

**1088. What is the relationship between the Coptic calendar and the ancient Egyptian calendar?**

Ancient Egyptians developed their calendar at least as far back as 4240 B. C. The famous Greek historian Herodotus remarks that the Egyptians preceded the Greeks in correcting their calendar by adding an additional five days each year to the standard twelve months of thirty days each.<sup>632</sup>

The Copts inherited an interest in the solar calendar from their ancestors, the Pharaohs, and until today, even illiterate Copts in Egypt still follow and pass on their oral traditions for the reckoning of times, by which they order the agricultural seasons, predict weather conditions, and worship using the liturgical calendar.

The Coptic year, which is of ancient Egyptian origin, is divided into twelve months, each of which contains thirty days, and to which are added five extra days at the end of the year called the “little month” or the *Epagomenal* days. Every four years, in a leap year, six days are added instead of five. The year is divided into three seasons with each season made up of four months. The first season is the season of the flooding of the Nile; the second is the season for sowing; and the third is the season for harvesting and gathering fruits. This seasonal structure continues to define the Coptic liturgical year in Egypt. It was also used outside of Egypt until the Holy Synod of the Coptic Church issued a decree to combine the prayers of the three seasons into a single unified litany of the air of the heaven, the fruits of the earth, and the waters of the rivers together, since in the diaspora, each land has its own agricultural conditions that are unlike those of Egypt.

**1089. What is the difference between the ancient Egyptian calendar and the Julian calendar?**<sup>633</sup>

In 46 B. C., **Julius Caesar** adopted the ancient Egyptian solar calendar, with the help of the Alexandrian astronomer **Sosigenes**. The original Roman calendar was lunar, and its year had 355 days. The Romans had reckoned thirty-one days in the months of March, May, Quintilis (July<sup>634</sup>), and October and twenty-eight days in February, while the rest of their months were twenty-nine days. In their new calendar, they added one day to each of April, September, and November, and two days to the months of January, Sextilis (August<sup>635</sup>), September, and December, bringing the Julian year to a total of 365 days. In the first thirty-six years from the inception of the Julian calendar, the extra day required in a leap year was added every three years instead of every four years, as per the ancient Egyptian calendar.

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<sup>632</sup> Herodotus. *The Histories of Herodotus*, trans., Henry Cary (D. Appleton and Company, 1904) 2.4: p. 86.

<sup>633</sup> See entries on “Calendar, Gregorian” and “Calendar, Julian” in *The Coptic Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, pp. 436–437; and Elisabeth Achelis, *Of Time and Calendar* (New York: Hermitage House, 1955).

<sup>634</sup> Later named after the Emperor Julius Caesar.

<sup>635</sup> Later named after the Emperor Augustus Caesar who changed its number of days from thirty to thirty-one.

The Julian calendar was adopted throughout the Western world. But around the year 325 A. D., its inaccuracy became apparent as it was realized that the Julian year of exactly 365.25 days was slightly longer than the actual solar year, which is precisely 365.24217 days long. This difference amounts to eleven minutes and fourteen seconds each year, which adds up to approximately a day and a half every two centuries or seven days every thousand years.

In 1582 A. D., **Pope Gregory XIII** of Rome omitted ten days from that year to correct for this accumulated error in the calendar. Thus, for that year only, the day after 4<sup>th</sup> October 1582 became 15<sup>th</sup> October. He further adjusted the calendar such that three times in every four hundred years (century years that are not divisible by 400), a leap year is omitted. The Gregorian calendar gradually replaced the Julian calendar in different parts of the Western world over the period from 1582 to 1924. For example, England adopted the Gregorian calendar in 1752. The Julian calendar is still used in the calculations of the Feast of the Resurrection and the moveable feasts that depend on it in the Orthodox Churches, which has resulted in the liturgical year of the Church today diverging from the Gregorian calendar by thirteen days.

### **1090. What connection is there between the Alexandrian Computus (Epact) and the Christian Pascha?**<sup>636</sup>

The difficulty in determining the date of Christian Pascha (Holy Week and Resurrection) for each year is due to the ancient condition it must fall after the Jewish Passover. Since the Jewish Passover is linked to the harvest for the Jews (Ex. 23:16), it always falls in the months of April or May; bearing in mind that the Jewish calendar is lunar. However, this calculation does not correspond to the seasons of Egypt because the time of harvest in Egypt differs from that in Palestine. Therefore, **Pope Demetrius of Alexandria** (second century) saw the need to devise a calculation that combines the solar cycle with the lunar cycle; according to which the Christian Pascha falls in the months of April or May, but not before the first week of April and not later than the first week of May.

This calculation consists of a cycle of nineteen solar-lunar years. Since the lunar year is eleven days shorter than the solar year, the number of days missing in nineteen lunar years from the corresponding number of solar years is two hundred and nine days. He distributed these days over nineteen years by adding a full month every two or three years. The Council of Nicaea approved this computation, and the Church observed it all over the world until the year 1582 A. D.

The Protestants broke away from the Roman Church in the sixteenth century. This was the same century in which the Roman **Pope Gregory XIII** requested that the Jewish Passover not be taken into account in the computation of the Christian Pascha, but that it is sufficient

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<sup>636</sup> See Iris Habib El-Masry, *The Story of the Copts: Book 1*, (Southern California, U.S.A: St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Monastery, undated) 4.A.24: p. 39.

only to take into account the time of the spring equinox. Protestants continued to use the Alexandrian computus until 1775 A. D., that is for about two centuries.

**1091. What connection is there between the Coptic calendar and the ancient Egyptian calendar?**

The Copts inherited the ancient Egyptian calendar from their ancestors, and with some slight modifications, used it to order their liturgical Church life and their daily affairs, especially agriculture. The Coptic liturgical day begins at sunset, like that of the Jews and the Greeks; and each week consists of seven days, the first of which is the Lord's Day (Sunday).

In the fourth century, many Copts were martyred, and they therefore considered the reign of Diocletian as a golden age. They set the year in which Diocletian became emperor (November, 284 A. D.) as the first year of their calendar. They introduced the term, "The Year of the Martyrs" (*Anno Martyrum*), abbreviated as A. M. The scholar Tertullian said, "If the martyrs throughout the world were to be put in one side of the scales and the Coptic martyrs alone were to be put in the other, the latter would outweigh the former."<sup>637</sup>

**1092. What are the names of the Coptic months?**

Certain papyri dating from the fifth century B. C. discovered on the island of Elephantine indicate that the Egyptians of the time celebrated great feasts in honor of the gods whose names were given to the months of the ancient Egyptian calendar. The Copts preserved the names of the ancient Egyptian months, despite the fact that they are the names of pagan gods or their feasts. The names of the months are:

1. **Thout** (begins 11<sup>th</sup> September / 12<sup>th</sup> September in a leap year): God of wisdom and knowledge, inventor of writing, protector of scribes, and designer of seasons and months. Thout presides over the "House of Life" and is the source of all the texts necessary to preserve and renew life.
2. **Paopi** (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> October): The Feast of Opet. Amun-Ra was accustomed to travelling from the Temple of Karnak to the Temple of Luxor to celebrate this famous festival.
3. **Hathor** (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> November): The goddess Hathor, the cow of the heavens, who gave birth to the sun and all beings: both divine and human; goddess of gold and of grains, especially wheat. Thus she was called, "Hathor the Golden."

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<sup>637</sup> Iris Habib El-Masry, *The Story of the Copts: Book 1*, (Southern California, U.S.A: St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Monastery, undated) 1.9.99: p. 100.

4. **Koiak** (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> December): This name is derived from a certain ritual of incense used in funerary celebrations known as “union with the spirit (*ka*).” This was also the month for celebrating the feasts of Osiris.
5. **Tobi** (9<sup>th</sup>/10<sup>th</sup> January): Also called Botti.
6. **Meshir** (8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> February): “The Great” where “The Great Fire” is.
7. **Paremhotep** (10<sup>th</sup>/11<sup>th</sup> March). One of the harvest months for the ancient Egyptians.
8. **Parmoute** (9<sup>th</sup> April): Dedicated to Ernütet, the goddess of harvest, who had the head of a cobra and sometimes nursed her son, Khepri, a god of grain.
9. **Pashons** (9<sup>th</sup> May): Derived from an ancient feast called Khonsu, a lunar deity, anciently referred to as the son of Amun and Mut.
10. **Paoni** (8<sup>th</sup> June): The Feast of the “Beautiful Valley” was celebrated during this month in the Valley of the Kings for ten days. It was considered the most important of the feasts of the ancient Egyptians, when sacrifices were offered, tombs were visited, and food was offered in honor of the deceased, all with the participation of relatives, dancers, and musicians.<sup>638</sup>
11. **Epip** (8<sup>th</sup> July): Dedicated to the goddess of fertility, Ipy.
12. **Mesori** (7<sup>th</sup> August): The last month in which they celebrated the birth of the sun god, Ra.
13. Lastly, **Al-Nasy** or **Pi-Kogi Enavot** (ΠΙΚΟΥΖΙ ΝΑΒΟΥΤ) or the little month (6<sup>th</sup> September): Osiris is celebrated during the first days of this month.

### 1093. How do we celebrate the New Year?

At the beginning of both the Coptic and Gregorian years, as well as the beginning of a new year in one’s own life when celebrating a birthday, we have become accustomed to spending some time in seclusion to thank God for His wonderful dealings with us and to re-evaluate our life in preparation for starting a new year. **St. John Chrysostom** was against the celebration of birthdays, given the birthday behavior of kings and emperors such as Herod the King (Matt. 14:6–11) and Belshazzar (Dan. 5).

On the first day of the little month, as the beginning of a new Coptic year approaches, the Church gives us a splendid example of personal encounter with the Savior in the Gospel of the liturgy for that day (John. 21:15–25), which recounts Simon Peter’s meeting with Christ on the shore after His resurrection — perhaps so that we might emulate him. We note in this passage:

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<sup>638</sup> Derchain, *Chronologie d’Egypte* (Cairo, 1954).

- a. The Lord of Glory initiated the encounter.
- b. After the Master sat with the disciples, He sat with Simon Peter (perhaps in private), or spoke to him in the presence of the disciples, for He was aware of Peter's longing to speak with Him (John 21:15).
- c. Simon Peter's heart was broken because he had denied the Lord despite the Lord's warning. Unusually, Simon was silent; but his heart was crying out, "Lord, open the door for me to speak with you, for I have nothing to say."
- d. May we ask the Lord Himself to direct our encounters with Him. He is the one who initiated the conversation with Zacchaeus the tax collector (Luke 19:3), the Samaritan woman (John 4:7), and here with Simon Peter (John 21:15).
- e. The Lord initiated the conversation with him, and in the spirit of love asked him, "Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?" (John 21:15). Peter's tone changed and he did not blurt out his answer, but with a contrite heart and a quiet voice he said, "Yes, Lord; You know that I love You." He had previously said, "Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You!" (Matt. 26:35).

Truly, God prepared humanity through the generations for every person and indeed every nation to discover the sins into which they have fallen. When the Lord appeared to Adam after the fall, Adam ought to have confessed his sin rather than blame the wife the Lord had given him. In contrast, the Samaritan woman acknowledged her sin (John 4:18). And the Lord gave us the example of the Pharisee and the tax collector; not to shame the tax collector, but that we might not fall into the hypocrisy and arrogance of the Pharisee — that we might imitate the tax collector who confessed his sin, saying, "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" (Luke 18:13). What the Lover of humanity urges us to do is focus our eyes on Him as the Forgiver of sins who is able to bestow upon us His righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30).

#### **1094. How can we make our celebrations a fruitful experience?**

Our encounter with Christ, the Head of the Church, is by no means limited to mourning over our sins, but also to responding to the call of the Lord to serve with joy. "The joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:10). The Lord did not say to Peter, "Your sins are forgiven." Rather, He asked him to work positively: "Feed my sheep" (John 21:17). Repentance and self-evaluation are the renunciation of evil *and* the embracing of the good: "Depart from evil, and do good" (Ps. 34:14). Sitting in the presence of the Lord means becoming attached to the One who forgives sins and works within us by His Holy Spirit. Our Lord Jesus girds us and carries us wherever He wills.

**1095. What are the most important fixed feasts in the Coptic calendar?**

The Coptic Church calendar is based on the Coptic months, but I will also provide the corresponding dates in the Gregorian calendar, although we should bear in mind that they may move by a day or two in leap years.

**1096. What are the most important occasions in the month of Thout?**

- a. **Nayrouz or the Feast of the Martyrs** (1<sup>st</sup> Thout / 11<sup>th</sup> September), when we pray in the joyful tune from the first day of Thout to the 16<sup>th</sup> — a testimony to the Holy Trinity who give joy our hearts.
- b. **The martyrdom of St. John the Baptist** (2<sup>nd</sup> Thout / 12<sup>th</sup> September) who was the greatest among those born of women. On the one hand, he prophesied about the Lamb of God bearing the sin of the world, and on the other hand, he witnessed Him firsthand.
- c. **The Feast of the Cross** (17<sup>th</sup> Thout / 27<sup>th</sup> September) (celebrated over three days and on 10<sup>th</sup> Paremhotep). The cross is the chariot of Christ, which took Him to Hades in order to restore in us the image of God, the precious pearl of great price. The cross shines in us and upon us, molding us into bright stars in a dark and twisted generation.

**1097. What are the most important occasions in the month of Paope?**

**The consecration of the Church of St. Mark and the appearance of his head** (30<sup>th</sup> Paope / 9<sup>th</sup> November) motivates us to open our hearts with love to all humanity and to pray for the salvation of all.

**1098. What are the most important occasions in the month of Hathor?**

- a. **The four incorporeal living creatures** who carry the chariot of God (8<sup>th</sup> Hathor / 17<sup>th</sup> November), when we become better acquainted with our beloved heavenly friends who welcome us.
- b. **The Archangel Michael** (12<sup>th</sup> Hathor / 21<sup>st</sup> November).
- c. **The Martyrdom of St. Mina the wonder worker** (15<sup>th</sup> Hathor / 24<sup>th</sup> November).
- d. **The beginning of the Nativity fast** (16<sup>th</sup> Hathor / 25<sup>th</sup> November).
- e. **The twenty-four heavenly presbyters** (24<sup>th</sup> Hathor / 3<sup>rd</sup> December).

**1099. What are the most important occasions in the month of Koiak (Kiahk, the month of vigil and praise)?**

- a. **The Archangel Raphael** (13<sup>th</sup> Kiahk / 22<sup>nd</sup> December).
- b. Midnight praises of the “**Seven and Four**” and the Sundays of Kiahk.
- c. **Paramoun of the Nativity**: the day before the Nativity feast (sometimes two or three days).
- d. **The Glorious Feast of the Nativity** (29<sup>th</sup> Kiahk / 7<sup>th</sup> January), We pray in the joyful tune from 29<sup>th</sup> Kiahk (the Nativity) until the Feast of the Circumcision on 6<sup>th</sup> Tobe — an invitation to behold God and enter into a dialogue with Him, becoming more aware of our authority over the devil, sin, and darkness, and opposing injustice and death.

**1100. What are the most important occasions in the month of Tobe?**

- a. **Martyrdom of the innocent children of Bethlehem** (3<sup>rd</sup> Tobe / 11<sup>th</sup> January), when we focus on the greatness of innocence of the heart and the chastity of soul and body.
- b. **Circumcision of Christ** (6<sup>th</sup> Tobe / 14<sup>th</sup> January), when we honor the circumcision of the soul, senses, and emotions.
- c. **Paramoun of Theophany** is the day before Theophany (can be two or three days some years).
- d. **Theophany** (11<sup>th</sup> Tobe / 19<sup>th</sup> January), on which the Lakkan or Liturgy of the Water is prayed (also prayed on the Feast of the Apostles and Covenant Thursday):
  - i. We become acquainted with divine mysteries.
  - ii. He gave us what is His: through Christ we become children of the Father.
  - iii. We crush the heads of the dragon.
  - iv. We are blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.
- e. **Wedding at Cana of Galilee** (13<sup>th</sup> Tobe / 21<sup>st</sup> January). The Master began His ministry by attending a wedding and concluded His ministry by offering His own blood to His bride as her dowry.

**1101. What are the most important occasions in the month of Meshir?**

**Presentation at the Temple** (8<sup>th</sup> Meshir / 15<sup>th</sup> February). The Lawgiver submits to the Law, so that by His cross He may establish His temple in us, dwell in us, and grant us His grace, that we may enjoy His Law and His commandments and practice them spiritually.



**1102. What are the most important occasions in the month of Paremhotep?**

- a. **Feast of the Cross** (10<sup>th</sup> Paremhotep / 19<sup>th</sup> March).
- b. **Annunciation** (29<sup>th</sup> Paremhotep / 7<sup>th</sup> April).

**1103. What are the most important occasions in the month of Parmoute?**

- a. **St. George the martyr** (23<sup>rd</sup> Parmoute / 1<sup>st</sup> May).
- b. **St. Mark the apostle** (30<sup>th</sup> Parmoute / 8<sup>th</sup> May).

**1104. What are the most important occasions in the month of Pashons?**

- a. **Nativity of the Virgin Mary** (1<sup>st</sup> Pashons / 9<sup>th</sup> May).
- b. **Commemoration of the departure of St. Athanasius the Apostolic** (7<sup>th</sup> Pashons / 15<sup>th</sup> May).
- c. **Christ's entry into the land of Egypt** (24<sup>th</sup> Pashons / 1<sup>st</sup> June).

**1105. What are the most important occasions in the month of Paone?**

- a. **Archangel Michael** (12<sup>th</sup> Paone / 19<sup>th</sup> June). It usually falls during the Fast of the Apostles.
- b. **Nativity of St. John the Baptist** (30<sup>th</sup> Paone / 7<sup>th</sup> July).

**1106. What are the most important occasions in the month of Epep?**

- a. **Feast of the Apostles** (5<sup>th</sup> Epep / 12<sup>th</sup> July) on which the Lakkan or Liturgy of the Waters is prayed (also prayed on the Theophany and Covenant Thursday).
- b. **St. Joseph the Carpenter** (26<sup>th</sup> Epep / 2<sup>nd</sup> August).

**1107. What are the most important occasions in the month of Mesore?**

- a. **St. Mary's Fast** (1<sup>st</sup>–15<sup>th</sup> Mesore / 7<sup>th</sup>–21<sup>st</sup> August).
- b. **Annunciation of the birth of the St. Mary** (7<sup>th</sup> Mesore).
- c. **Transfiguration** (13<sup>th</sup> Mesore).
- d. **Assumption of the body of St. Mary** (16<sup>th</sup> Mesore 22<sup>nd</sup> August).
- e. **Commemoration of the fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** (28<sup>th</sup> Mesore).

**1108. What are the most important occasions in the Little Month or Pi Kogi?**

- a. **Archangel Raphael**, 3<sup>rd</sup> Pi Kogi
- b. **Preparation for the Second Coming** during the last two weeks of the year.

**1109. What are the moveable occasions that depend on the date of the Feast of the Resurrection (Christian Pascha) each year?**

- a. **Jonah's Fast** begins fifteen days before the start of Lent and lasts three days: Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. On Thursday, the pascha of Jonah is celebrated as a prophecy of the resurrection of Christ or the Christian Pascha.
- b. The **Great Lenten Fast** has a weekday rite that differs from that of Saturdays and Sundays, as well as a rite for the evening prayers of Sunday, and for the last Friday of Lent.

**1110. What is Holy Week or Passion Week (the week of the Christian Pascha)?**

- a. Lazarus Saturday.
- b. Palm Sunday (the procession of the Lamb of God); the general funeral prayers, and Eve of Monday of the Holy Pascha.
- c. The Monday Paschal prayers (cleansing of the temple, planting the tree of life in place of the barren fig tree); Tuesday Paschal prayers (the Bridegroom reveals his mysteries); and Wednesday Paschal prayers (the Bridegroom proclaims of His goodness).
- d. Covenant Thursday (presentation of the dowry to the bride).
- e. Good Friday or the day of the crucifixion (the celebration of the wedding).
- f. Bright Saturday (the liberation of the captives); and the Apocalypse vigil of praises (the Book of Revelation — heaven awaits us).

**1111. What are the Holy Fifty Days following the Feast of the Resurrection?**

- a. The Feast of the Resurrection and the evening prayer on Resurrection Sunday (an invitation to the resurrected life).
- b. Thomas Sunday (or New Sunday, or the eighth day).
- c. Feast of the Ascension, forty days after the Resurrection.
- d. Pentecost (descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles) and the Prostration Prayer on the fiftieth day after the Resurrection (preparation for the heavenly annunciation).

- e. Fast of the Apostles ending with the Feast of the Apostles Peter and Paul (invitation to evangelical service).

**1112. What connection is there between the Church calendar and the Bridegroom who is the joy of every heart?**

The heart of a parent longs to participate in some way in the preparations for the celebration of the marriage of their son or daughter, and the formation of a new, happy, and elated family. When people get married, they prepare for this day and expect their family and friends to share their joy in establishing this new family.

When the Lord of Glory wanted to evoke in his believers a sense of sincere joy, He likened the kingdom of heaven to five wise virgins (Matt. 25:1–13) waiting for the coming of the Bridegroom, the Sun of Righteousness, to take them with Him on the clouds into eternal glory. Our Christ sent His Holy Spirit to the Church to adorn every soul and renew it and adorn it with the spirit of joy in preparation for the eternal wedding. The Coptic Church calendar takes advantage of every possible opportunity to spread this spirit of joy in the lives of the faithful. Here are some examples:

- a. **When we commemorate saints and martyrs**, we usually read out the passage of the wise virgins who carry lighted lamps and enter with the Sun of Righteousness into eternal heavenly joy. All the hosts of heaven exult in the holy bride. They serenade the children of the Most High like morning stars when the Lord’s created the earth and all its blessings for the sake of humanity (Job 38:7) and prepared for Adam and Eve the Garden of Eden as a royal matrimonial home. How much more will the hosts of heaven rejoice when they see that the people of dust have become their colleagues in the choir of heaven, praising God and glorifying Him?
- b. **When we commemorate the martyrs**, the Church urges her children through the readings of the divine liturgy not to be afraid of those who kill the body (Matt. 10:28). The martyrdoms of the faithful who have gone before us are an invitation to us all to live in the spirit of strength, hope, and joy.
- c. **Whenever a Coptic month contains five Sundays**, the gospel of the feeding of the multitudes (John 6:5–14 or Luke 9:12–27) is read on the fifth Sunday (except during Great Lent and the Holy Fifty Days after Resurrection). The fifth Sunday is called the Sunday of Blessing. Just as the Lord of Glory blessed bread and fish and fed the multitude, the Sunday of Blessing reminds us that we shall one day enter into eternal glory in an atmosphere of joy, fulfillment, and beatification.
- d. **When we commemorate the departures of patriarchs and bishops**, we usually read out the gospel of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1–16, which is read on thirty-eight occasions through the year). At the enthronement of the late **Pope Shenouda III**, he read out this gospel, but after reading the words, “I am the good shepherd. The good

shepherd gives His life for the sheep,” he inserted the words, “says the Lord of glory, Jesus.” He added this phrase to emphasize that the real speaker of these words is not the human patriarch but the Lord Christ Himself, who is the true joy of hearts, the Shepherd of souls, and the Savior of the world.

It should not surprise us that this passage is read on the commemoration days of the leaders of the Church, for it is a reminder that the true leader of the Church is the Lord of Glory, Jesus. By the same token, every leader — whether bishop, priest, deacon, Church servant, father or mother — must be constantly aware and trust that the care of souls belongs to the Savior who alone is capable of pouring His joy into them and granting them His divine righteousness, if they respond to Him by the work of His Holy Spirit and enter into fellowship with Him.

There is a second gospel passage that is sometimes read out instead in the divine liturgy when we commemorate a patriarch: Matt. 16:13–19, which is read on sixteen occasions through the year. In it, the apostle St. Peter testifies to the Lord Christ: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16), to which He responds by declaring that on this faith, given to Peter by the Father in heaven, the Lord builds His Church, and not any human being (Matt. 16:17), and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it (Matt. 16:18). The Church, the exultant bride who bears the image of her Bridegroom, the joy of hearts, assures everyone that no one can enjoy inner heavenly joy or spread it into the lives of his brothers, sisters, or children, except by the work of the Holy Spirit who is sent by the Lord to dwell in His Church.

- e. The Church propagates the spirit of joy in us also on the scale of days and weeks. For example, at the dawn of each day, the Morning Prayers occupy us with the resurrection of the Lord of Glory, Jesus, so that we may receive from Him each new day as one in which we live the life of resurrection from death. And at midnight, we remember that the Bridegroom is coming again to take us away to eternal glories.

And on the scale of weeks, every Sunday we remember the resurrection of Christ, knowing that His resurrection is the promise of our own resurrection, which we begin to experience here in this world but will enjoy more abundantly on the day we meet Him who arose from the dead face to face.

- f. If we consider the stories of the saints throughout history, we notice that the universal theme that runs through all of them is joy, through which God spreads His arms always open to embrace everyone who returns to Him. In the parable of the prodigal son who returned to his father, the father raced towards him and hugged him and held a feast for him to share the joy with his whole household, even the workers and servants (Luke 15:22–33). And when the woman found the silver coin she had lost, she invited her neighbors to come and share in her joy at finding that which she had lost (Luke 15: 8–10).

In summary, then, the purpose of the Church calendar is for the Church to fulfil her mission to become an icon of her heavenly Bridegroom. As such, it behooves us on every occasion — whether daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly — to never desist from prayer, through which the Holy Trinity works in us and in every soul; not only that we may rejoice, but that the hearts of others also may be filled with joy.

The names of the Archangels invite us to become an icon of our Savior who gives to the heart. The **Archangel Michael** (which means ‘who is like God?’) invites us to imitate God, to be illuminated, and to reflect heavenly light and joy upon those around us. The **Archangel Gabriel** (‘God is mighty’) invites us to imitate the Almighty, that we may never taste impossibility so long as we are in communion with Him. The **Archangel Raphael** (‘God’s tender mercies’), the elater of hearts, invites us to delight in the tender mercies of God and disseminate the spirit of joy in every heart. And the **Archangel Suriel** (‘trumpet of God’) invites us to carry the divine trumpet and invite our brothers and sisters to celebrate the heavenly Bridegroom, our Lord Jesus in a perpetual feast of joyous souls.



Book 5

*The Believer and the*  
**Heavenly Hosts**

1. The Creation of the Spiritual World
2. Our Companionship with the Heavenly Hosts
3. The Order of the Heavenly Hosts
4. The Devil Has No Power Over Us





# 1

## The Creation of the Spiritual World

### 1113. What is the spiritual world?

God's original plan was to create a kingdom with citizens who partake of the goods of that kingdom prepared for His holy creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ tells us, "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. Then the King will say to those on His right hand: 'Come you blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'" (Matt. 25:31, 34).

This would not be experienced by force, but through the freedom of our will when the true believer joins the ranks of the exalted spiritual beings. Scripture confirms that "God created man a little lower than the angels" (Ps. 8:5). But after the fall, the angels responded to God's love for humanity by bringing them divine messages for their benefit that humanity may repent and return to God.

### 1114. Who are the angels?

Angels are rational heavenly beings without a human body who have their own will and power but are also obedient to God.

### 1115. Why were they called angels?

The word 'angel' means 'messenger.' They are appointed by God as messengers, proclaiming His will and salvation to humans. One example for this is found in the Annunciation of the Archangel Gabriel to St. Mary (Luke 1:26–38). Another example is the Archangel Raphael in the book of Tobit. God wants the spiritual world to partake of His love of humanity and His desire for their salvation. According to Daniel the prophet:

"My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him, and, also, O king, I have done no wrong before you" (Dan. 6:22).

The word 'angel' does not refer to their nature, but to their message and work. The prophets and clergy are, therefore counted as 'messengers,' based on their role to tell the world about God's love. Even the Lord Christ Himself, the Lord of angels, was called "The Messenger of the covenant" (Mal. 3:1–3).

### 1116. Is it necessary to know about the nature of heavenly beings, whether good or evil?

We must consider the following:

A human being cannot explain his own spirit, nor determine its location or size, even though he is certain of its existence and abilities. How, then, can he know the nature of bodiless heavenly beings?

The Bible refers to some of heavenly hosts and describes some of their features to us, although human language is not capable of describing heavenly matters. This is confirmed by the book of Revelation.

The Church Fathers affirm the love of the heavenly hosts for us and believe that Scripture reveals to us those truths about them that pertain to our lives and struggles, in order to kindle the spirit of hope within us.

When we depart from this world, we expect to meet them, to join the choir of the heavenly hosts, and to learn more about them.

The mutual love between them and humans is valuable in the eyes of the Creator.

Talking about them wipes out any fear of death from the minds of both children and adults, for we feel and enjoy their friendship.

It is appropriate for us to distinguish hallucinations or imaginary experiences — whether in dreams or waking — from the heavenly realities of eternal life that is declared in the word of God.

Scripture reveals to us how Satan was exalted before his fall and his persist opposition to God so that we can learn from this lesson, abide in God and understand what God offers us, in order to fight the devil and join the heavenly hosts of angels.

### **1117. Why does Scripture talk about the heavenly hosts?**

Scripture attests to their role in the life of humanity when it says, “Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?” (Heb. 1:14).

The words “angel, angels, cherub, and cherubim,” and the names of other heavenly hosts are mentioned more than 230 times in the Old Testament and 190 times in the New Testament, which encourages the believer to know them and their love for humanity, and their strong desire for us to enjoy salvation.

### **1118. Are we each assigned a ‘guardian angel’?**

The doctrine of the guardian angel is based on Scripture (see Gen. 48:16; Tob. 3:25; Acts 12:15). Further, Christ says, “Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I say to you that, in heaven, their angels always see the face of My Father, who is in heaven” (Matt. 18:10). And the Psalmist says, “For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways” (Ps. 91:11). And, “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who

fear Him” (Ps. 34:7). Also, those gathered in the upper room said to the maid that the one who is knocking on the door is not Peter but his angel (Acts 12:15). St. Paul also asked women to cover their hair “because of the angels” (1 Cor. 11:10).

The Jews thought that two angels accompany them when they return from the synagogue on the Sabbath, one good and the other evil. This particular teaching appears in some early Christian writings, for example, in the Epistle of Barnabas<sup>639</sup> and in the works of St. Clement of Alexandria. In the book, *The Shepherd of Hermas* we find: “There are two angels with a man—one of righteousness, and the other of iniquity ... When anger comes upon you, or harshness, know that the devil is in you. When these ascend into your heart, know that the angel of iniquity is in you. Now that you know his works, depart from him, and in no respect trust him, because his deeds are evil, and unprofitable to the servants of God.”<sup>640</sup>

Origen notes that “We must believe that angels, since they are the servants appointed by God, to be with the believers as they pray that they may pray with them. Every believer—even the youngest in the church—is helped by an angel who beholds God’s face and His divinity and thus, the angel aids us as much as possible in whatever we ask for.”

“... each believer, although the humblest in the Church, is said to be attended by an angel, who is declared by the Saviour always to behold the face of God the Father.”<sup>641</sup>

“But when a person shall have accepted the faith, then Christ, who is the redeemer and redeemed him from the malignant lords with the price of his own blood, delivers the person believing in God to an angel who is holy and always sees the ‘face of the Father’ because of his purity.”<sup>642</sup>

“... if we must say that every human soul has been placed under some angel, as under a father.”<sup>643</sup>

“Every soul who, after she has turned to God and come to faith, undoubtedly experiences conflicts of thought and assaults of evil spirits, which strive to call her back to the attractions of her former life and the errors of unbelief. But lest this should happen, lest the evil spirits should again find foothold in her, God’s providence looked forward in such wise as to provide the little ones and those who, being as yet but babes and sucklings in Christ, cannot defend themselves against the wiles of the devil and the attacks of evil spirits, with angel champions

<sup>639</sup> “Epistle to Barnabas,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings*, Penguin Classics, 2000, pp. 155–184, 18: p. 179.

<sup>640</sup> Pastor of Hermas (or *Shepherd of Hermas*) Commandment 6.2 (ANF 2:24).

<sup>641</sup> Origen, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.10.7 (ANF 4:296).

<sup>642</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13.28: p. 422.

<sup>643</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 13.5: p. 404.

and guardians. These are ordained by Him to act as tutors and governors of those who, as we said, are underage and so unable to fight for themselves.”<sup>644</sup>

“Or at least since the Lord in the gospel testifies that the hearts of sinners are besieged by ‘seven demons’ (Luke 11:26), ‘the priest’ appropriately ‘sprinkles seven times before the Lord’ in purification that the expulsion ‘of the seven evil spirits’ from the heart of the person purified may be shown by ‘the oil shaken seven times from the fingers.’”<sup>645</sup>

“For the just are those who need the help of angels of God, to keep them from being overwhelmed by demons, so that their hearts not be pierced by “an arrow flying in the darkness’ (cf. Ps. 91:5).”<sup>646</sup>

“When the angels saw the Lord of hosts walking on earth, they followed Him and walked on the way which He first opened, since He assigned them to care for those who believe in Him. So the angels are serving your salvation. When He took flesh, they had to follow him. I can hear them say, ‘If He took a mortal body, how can we stand idle? Come all you angels. Come! Let us descend from heaven.’ For this reason, there were numerous angels praising God and glorifying Him at the birth of Christ. The place was full of them.”<sup>647</sup>

So, every individual has a guardian angel, as does every city and every church.

### **1119. Do all Jewish sects believe in the existence of angels?**

While the Pharisees believed in the existence of angels, the Sadducees, on the other hand, denied the resurrection and the existence of angels and spirits (Acts 23:8).

### **1120. How many angels are there?**

The book of Daniel notes that “a thousand thousands ministered to Him and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him” (Dan. 7:10). Therefore, we can conclude that they are innumerable.

In the book of Revelation, it says, “I looked and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures. And the elders, and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands” (Rev. 5:11).

According to the Jews, they are innumerable. Sixty thousand angels rejoiced when they saw Jacob depart from the house of Laban his uncle and they strengthened him when they

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<sup>644</sup> Origen, *Origen: The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* Commentary 2.3 (ACW 26:117).

<sup>645</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Leviticus 1–16* 8.11.14 (FOTC 83:175).

<sup>646</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) 5.3.4: p. 20.

<sup>647</sup> Origen, *In Ex. hom.* 1.7.

saw that he was afraid of his brother Esau (Gen. 32:2). And in Sinai, God appeared, accompanied by twenty-two thousand hosts of angels.<sup>648</sup>

At the birth of Christ, a great multitude of angels appeared praising God (Luke 2:13–15), and when Christ was arrested, He said that He is capable of calling more than twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53).

According to St. John (Rev. 5:11) and St. Paul (Heb. 12:22), angels are innumerable.

### **1121. Are all angels good?**

As there are good angels who love and praise God, there are evil angels as well who arrogantly challenge God and are referred to as ‘devils.’

### **1122. When were angels created? And how were they created?**

The Holy Bible contains no mention of either when or how angels were created. However, in the book of Exodus we find: “For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it” (Ex. 20:11). And, according to St. Paul: “For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16).

The only reference to the time of their creation we have is in the book of Job: “When the morning stars (the angels) sang together; and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7). The saintly Church Fathers agree that God created the heavenly hosts before He created the world and humanity.<sup>649</sup>

Some Fathers, such as St. Ephrem the Syrian, thought that the angels were created when the world was created, on the first day when the heavens were created; or else on the fourth day when the stars and planets were created. But according to The Shepherd of Hermas<sup>650</sup> and St. Gregory the Theologian, they were there created before anything of our world was created.

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<sup>648</sup> The Jewish Encyclopedia, “Angelology.”

<sup>649</sup> See St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* 6 (NPNF II/5:478–479; PG 45:28); St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 38.9 (NPNF II/7:347; PG 36:320).

<sup>650</sup> *Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* Vision 3.4 (ANF 2:14).

**1123. Why was the Bible concluded with the book of Revelation, which frequently referred to the heavenly hosts?**

Because the Lord of heaven wishes to make the heart of His church burn with the desire to depart to Him to enjoy the heavenly life.

**God is present in His church** (Cf. Rev. 2-3), heals her weakness, comforts her, and grants her the eternal heavenly joy together with the heavenly hosts.

It reveals how the heavenly hosts care for the church and support her that she may experience the sweetness of heaven.

The book of Revelation proclaims ‘Jerusalem’ the exalted heavenly city, being the “dwelling place of God with men”, and our eternal home.

Our knowledge of the heavenly hosts reveals to us certain aspects that apply to our current life of faith. In getting to know them, we learn more about their divine gifts and we desire to acquire these same features through God’s grace. Our study of the heavenly hosts in Scripture, the church’s Tradition, and the writings of the Church Fathers reveals to us hidden mysteries concerning the heavenly life, the holy church, and the spiritual life of the believer, especially servants.

**1124. Is the nature of angels spiritual, incorporeal, and eternal?**

According to **St. John of Damascus**, “[the angels] are borne to the regions above and are quite delivered from all material thought ... They are circumscribed: for when they are in the Heaven they are not on the earth: and when they are sent by God down to the earth they do not remain in the Heaven. They are not hemmed in by walls and doors, and bars and seals, for they are quite unlimited. Unlimited, I repeat, for it is not as they really are that they reveal themselves to the worthy men to whom God wishes them to appear, but in a changed form which the beholders are capable of seeing. For that alone is naturally and strictly unlimited which is un-created. For every created thing is limited by God Who created it.”<sup>651</sup>

According to some Church Fathers, angels have light and incorporeal bodies in comparison to human beings. But when compared to God who is intangible and simple in His nature, they are considered heavy and tangible.

**St. Basil the Great** says that angels do not have bodies that decay like humans. Angels have no children, youth, or elders, since they remain as they are from the time of their creation. According to St. Luke the Evangelist, “Those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead; neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the

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<sup>651</sup> St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.3 (NPNF II/9:B19; PG 94:869).

resurrection” (Luke 20:35–36). St John of Damascus believes that angels are eternal, not by nature, but by grace like humans.

### **1125. Do angels have free will?**

Angels are spiritual beings and have authority and free will; whether to stay as they are and grow in goodness and virtue, or to become evil.<sup>652</sup> According to **St. Basil the Great**, it is possible for the angels to deviate towards evil because the heavenly hosts are not holy by nature. Holiness is outside their nature which they can acquire by their hard work and watchfulness. Their perfection is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit within them and their correct usage of their free will.

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<sup>652</sup> See St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.3 (NPNF II/9:B19; PG 94:868).





## 2

### **Our Companionship with the Heavenly Hosts**

#### **1126. Do the heavenly hosts cease from praising God in order to pray for us and intercede on our behalf?**

This question can only arise in the mind of someone who thinks of these hosts as physical beings and so assumes that their praises come through mouths, tongues, and vocal cords like ours. So, if praise in its essence is love, proceeding from the depths of any creature, it can never cease. This is like parents who love their sick child and so will not let any work distract them from their love and care for him. So we ask:

- Did the Archangel Gabriel cease from praising God while he announced the incarnation of Christ to St. Mary and enjoyed that wondrous conversation with her (Luke 1:26–38)?
- Would the heavenly hosts ever cease from praising as they offer incense before God, which are the prayers of the saints (Rev. 5:8)?
- Did the Archangel Michael cease from praising while he contended with the devil over the body of Moses (Jude 9)?
- Did the Lord’s angel cease from praising while he killed the 185, 000 Assyrians (2 Kings 16:35)?
- Did the angel cease from praising while waking Peter up to liberate him prison (Acts 12:5–10)?
- Did the angel cease from praising while he was shutting the lions’ mouths (Dan. 6:20–29), or while instructing the gentile centurion Cornelius to send for Peter the apostle (Acts 10:11), or when providing Hagar and her son Ishmael with water (Gen. 21:17–19)?

#### **1127. Why do we celebrate feasts for the heavenly beings?**

- a. Such feasts afford us the opportunity to reflect upon and to imitate the angels in their obedience to God, their love for others, and their glorification and thanksgiving to God for His works. It was said in the book of Revelation, “The four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song, saying: You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals, for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood, out of every tribe and tongue and people

and nation. And have made us kings and priests to our God, and we shall reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:8–10).

- b. We see the heavenly presbyters praising the Lord, praying on our behalf, and offering our prayers before the divine throne.
- c. The incorporeal priests rejoice over our joy, and they feel that we are their brothers and partners in the heavenly life. Thus, the Lamb who was crucified for us, has united heaven and earth and made them one.
- d. The feasts of angels inspire us to understand the Lord’s work with us: “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21).
- e. The focus of the word of God in both Testaments is the idea of “restoring the lost pearl” which is the image of God. It is only when this image is restored to humanity that we can share with the heavenly hosts and be counted as being among the heavenly hosts, honored before God and His angels.
- f. Within the two Testaments of the Holy Bible there is no single account of the ranks or the nature of heavenly beings. Our Creator and Savior does not want us to have dry curiosity for mere knowledge; rather, He reveals mysteries to us according to our needs, for our edification, and according to the circumstances of our times, so that we may be able to enjoy His presence eternally.

### **1128. What are the characteristics of heavenly beings?**

Heavenly beings are rational, dynamic, incorporeal, immortal beings who serve God. Their true nature is only known to the Creator Himself. However, the Holy Bible says of them in general, “He makes His angels spirits and His ministers, flames of fire” (Heb. 1:7; Ps. 104:4). They can easily move everywhere unhindered by physical obstacles such as closed doors or walls. They are not extended in three-dimensional physical space, but are limited so that when God sends them to earth for a specific task, they can no longer be in heaven at the same time.

**St. Basil the Great** says that their bodies are unchangeable since they do not eat and drink, unlike humans who also age. So, there are no children, youth, or elders among the angels, for they remain in the same form in which they were initially created. **St. John of Damascus** says that angels are immortal by grace and not by nature, like the human soul. **St. Cyril the Great** thinks that angels cannot read our thoughts, but only God, for “God Alone understands what is in us.”<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>653</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 2.1 (LFHCC 43:166; PG 73:224).

Some Fathers believe that angels have ethereal, delicate, and immortal bodies in comparison to the bodies of human beings. By analogy to God who is Spirit, they are called spiritual bodies. The Second Council of Nicaea<sup>654</sup> in 787 A. D. declared that angels have ethereal or luminous bodies, based on the following:

- a. Human bodies will be transformed into spiritual bodies in the resurrection (1 Cor. 15:44), which confirms the existence of such kinds of bodies.
- b. Angels are subject to space and time, and their power, authority, knowledge, and holiness are limited. God created these heavenly creatures with great heavenly powers so that they can have the capability of obeying God and fulfilling His will in the fastest way possible. Thus, He created them with spiritual bodies that allow them to move quickly in heaven and on earth. This does not mean, however, that they are unlimited, or that each of them is present everywhere — only that they can move from place to place with great speed (Dan. 9:21–23).
- c. St. John Chrysostom says, “The Son of God was sent not as a servant or a slave for He is the Only begotten Son who has the same will of His Father. As for the angels, they move from one place to another so that they leave one place to be sent to another where they were not.” Daniel the Prophet says, “Behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me” (Dan. 10:13).
- d. Angels are spiritual beings with free will, having the authority and freedom to either advance in goodness and virtue; or else, deviate towards evil.<sup>655</sup> St. Basil believes that angels can deviate, because they are not holy by nature. Holiness is outside of their nature, though they can acquire it with diligence and earnest effort. Their perfection is due to the work of the Holy Spirit and their good use of their free will. St. Basil says in his letter to Amphilochius that angels have free will and can choose good or evil, so they are always in need of the help of the Holy Spirit. Also, in his third treatise against Eunomius, he says that angels acquire holiness through their own effort and through their contemplation of God but are not holy by nature. When they desire goodness, they receive holiness according to the degree of their love for God. And in his treatise on the Trinity, he says that these heavenly beings receive holiness from the Holy Spirit according to their ranks, and so he again emphasizes that they are not good by nature, but by their free will.
- e. What keeps angels from falling is their constant contemplation of God and their awareness of that temptation which caused some hosts of angels to fall because of pride. Also, when they constantly resist the evil angels, this increases their desire for holiness and for being with God.

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<sup>654</sup> The Church of Alexandria did not take part in this Council.

<sup>655</sup> See St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.3 (NPNF II/9:B19; PG 94:868).

- f. Angels cannot predict future events or the thoughts of the human heart. St. Cyril says that the angels know that only God knows the secrets of human hearts.<sup>656</sup>

### **1129. Do angels have a certain form?**

**St. Macarius** says, “[The soul] has an image or form in the same way as an angel has. As the angels have an image or form, and as the outward man has his image, so the inner man has an image like an angel’s, and a form like that of the outward man.”<sup>657</sup>

### **1130. Are they rational beings that exist independently, even though they do not have a physical body?**

They are not mere abstract energies, but each angel has its own independent personality, an identity independent of the rest of the angels. Each angel has its own free will to make its own decisions that distinguish it from other heavenly beings.

- a. The angel is a **rational being**, and because it is not clothed in a dense body, it has superior knowledge and understanding beyond humans. This does not mean that its knowledge is absolute — it is somewhat limited according to its capabilities and its merit as a gift from God to it.
- b. Angels can **communicate** with rational beings, as when the angel spoke to the two women at the tomb (Matt. 28:5).
- c. Angels possess **motives of love and joy**. Angels shouted for joy to the Creator (Job 38:7). The Seraphim worshiped in fear and trembling and praised God (Isa. 6:3). They also rejoice over a sinner who has repented (Luke 15:10).
- d. Angels have **free will** and can choose between obedience or disobedience to God. It was said that Lucifer, who was of the greatest angelic ranks, fell because he held onto his own opinion and will (Isa. 14:11–15).
- e. **Luminous beings**: Good angels are angels of light in comparison to the forces of darkness (2 Cor. 11:14; Eph. 6:12). When an angel appeared to Peter in prison, he caused light to shine in the cell (Acts 12:7).
- f. They **work collectively**: It was said: “And it was once that he brought his sons to appear before the Lord” (Job 1:6; 2:1). And they welcomed the creation of the world with a collective shout as God says, “Where were you when I laid the foundations of

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<sup>656</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Volume 1* 2.1 (LFHCC 43:166; PG 73:224).

<sup>657</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 7.7: p. 64.

the earth? Tell Me ... when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:7).

- g. Angels **do not have genders**, but usually if they appear to humans, they take the form of humans (Gen. 18:2, 22; 19:1; Dan. 10:18) with great beauty and cannot even be recognized to be angels. (Gen. 18:2; 19:5)
- h. **Immortality:** Angels are like the human soul in being immortal (Luke 20:36).

### 1131. Why did God create angels?

**St. Gregory the Theologian** says in his Oration on Nativity that God created angels because of His goodness that He may pour on them from His goodness and that they may enjoy thinking of Him and serving Him.<sup>658</sup>

The Holy Bible explains the relationship of good and evil angels to the creation of humanity. Good angels praised God and rejoiced, while the evil angels envied them, especially Satan.

### 1132. Why were angels created before humans?

The creation of the angels before humans gave them a chance to declare their joy for the creation of the beautiful world for humanity. They did not need plants, animals, birds, or fish, because angels do not have flesh that needs all this; yet they praised God’s work for their brethren who were created on earth (Job 8:38). The creation of humanity revealed the transcendence of the heavenly hosts and their love for the rational creation on earth. At the same time, the creation of humanity filled the cup of Satan and his evil angels, as Solomon the Wise says: “But death entered the world by the envy of the devil” (Wis. of Sol. 2:24).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What is meant by ‘through the devil’s envy death entered the world?’ You see, since this wicked beast saw that the first-formed human being was created immortal, by his characteristic wickedness he led him on to disobedience of the command and in that way caused him to bring on himself the penalty of death. So envy caused deception, deception caused disobedience, and disobedience caused death.”<sup>659</sup>

### 1133. Can a human see angels?

A human cannot see the angels as they are with his physical eyes but can only see them by God’s permission, as in the case of Gehazi, Elisha’s disciple, who saw an angelic army surrounding and defending them (2 Kings 6:17). For our benefit, God may also allow even animals to see angels as in the case of Balaam’s donkey (Num. 22:26–31).

<sup>658</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations of Gregory Nazianzen* 38.9 (NPNF II/7:347).

<sup>659</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis (46–67)* 46.15 (FOTC 87:11–12).

### 1134. What is the food of Angels?

The wise Solomon believes that the people of Israel enjoyed the bread of angels on their journey in the wilderness. Perhaps he does not mean the manna itself since angels do not need food like the manna. However, God in his love for his people, gave His obedient believers inner satisfaction and sweetness, so that each of them may find what he desires. It is written in the book of Wisdom “Instead of these things You fed Your people the food of angels, and without their labor You provided them with ready-made bread from heaven, fitting for every pleasure and suitable to every taste” (Wisd. Of Sol. 16:20). Throughout the exodus, the people were not only served by angels, but also partook of their food. God gave His people bread from heaven — without their labor — that was delicious and sweet for every one of them (Ex. 16).

The scholar **Origen** calls us to go out on a spiritual journey in the wilderness of this life that we may acquire the bread of angels: “If you have understood how much rest the journey of wisdom has, how much grace, how much sweetness, do not hesitate, do not be negligent, but undertake this journey, and do not shrink back from the solitude of the desert. For to you who dwell in tabernacles of this sort there will come even heavenly manna, and ‘you will eat the bread of angels’: Only begin, and as we have said, do not let the solitude of the desert frighten you. Even angels will come quickly into your company, which I think are indicated under the form of cedars.”<sup>660</sup>

Angels are nourished by spiritual food which is the encounter with the living God, who gives the soul life and satisfaction. **St. John of Damascus** says, “They behold God according to their capacity, and this is their food. They are above us for they are incorporeal, and are free of all bodily passion, yet are not passionless: for God alone is passionless.”<sup>661</sup> The Jews believe that angels feed on the glory of God since “in the light of the king’s face is life” (Prov. 16:15).<sup>662</sup> They also say that in order for Moses to become like the angels, he needed to completely set aside all food and drink for his body.<sup>663</sup>

### 1135. Are angels subject to judgment?

Since the heavenly hosts are part of creation, they are subject to judgment just like a star (one of the greatest among the heavenly ranks) that has fallen (Isa. 14:12) and has dragged down with it many ranks. Satan and his angels fell into pride and were therefore judged and cast into the eternal hell.

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<sup>660</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Numbers*, trans., Thomas P. Scheck (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2009) 17.4.9: p. 108.

<sup>661</sup> St. John of Damascus, *An Exact Exposition of the Orthodox Faith* 2.3 (NPNF II/9:B19).

<sup>662</sup> Prov. 16:15; Pesik 6:57a.

<sup>663</sup> Targ. Yer. Gen. 18:8, and in the Midrash.

We can say that all the heavenly hosts stand before God to give an account for their deeds, but since they have now rejected Satan for the sake of God's kingdom, they can no longer fall; not because their nature does not allow them to, but because they have already passed the test of humility and still abide by their spirit of humility and joy. Their status has become like that of the saints who have departed, but of course it is a bit different because humans have their own weaknesses because of their flesh that has been sanctified by the precious blood of Christ through the work of the fiery Holy Spirit.

The ruler of this world, Satan (John 16:11) has been condemned, and on the great day of the Lord, the Lord will say, "to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" (Matt. 25:41).

### 1136. Do angels have a role in the life of the Church?

The scholar **Origen** believes that an angel joyfully accepts the one who receives baptism, because of the great blessings that the baptized receive. He says, "For the heavenly powers, the ministries of angels, 'the church of the firstborn,' were present at the time when the mystery of the faith was transmitted to you. If we understand correctly that 'Israel' means 'seeing God in the mind,' even more correctly is it said concerning angelic ministries, according to the opinion of the Lord. When he spoke of infants—and in fact you yourself were an infant in baptism—he said that 'their angels always behold the face of my Father, who is in heaven' (Matt. 18:10). Therefore, in the presence of those sons of Israel, who were beholding the face of God, who were present at that time when the mysteries of the faith were transmitted to you, Jesus 'wrote Deuteronomy' in your heart."<sup>664</sup>

Again he says, "in the time of one's infidelity and sins one is a human being born of infidelity under the angels of Satan, malignant spirits, and unclean demons. But when a person shall have accepted the faith, then Christ, who is the redeemer and redeemed him from the malignant lords with the price of his own blood, delivers the person believing in God to an angel who is holy and always sees the 'face of the Father' because of his purity."<sup>665</sup>

Before coming to the faith, one is subdued by the devil; but after coming to the faith, God dedicates an angel to guide the person to good deeds and to protect him from evil angels. With reference to the words, "When through the laver I became a child in Christ," it may be said, that there is no holy angel present with those who are still in wickedness, but that during the period of unbelief they are under the angels of Satan. But, after the regeneration, He who has redeemed us with His own blood consigns to us a holy angel, who also, because of his purity, beholds the face of God.

<sup>664</sup> Origen, *Homilies on Joshua* 9.4 (FOTC 105:100).

<sup>665</sup> Origen, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew*. Vol. 2, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018), 13.28: p. 422

**Origen** also says that angels go back and forth between heaven and earth. “For we know that they ascend to heaven, carrying the people’s prayers and then they descend carrying all blessings for every person. God has dedicated them to offer His blessings to those who love Him.”<sup>666</sup>

### **1137. Why do the angels rejoice when the faithful gather together?**

**Origen** says, “And a place of prayer, the spot where believers assemble together, is likely to have something gracious to help us, since angelic powers are placed near the throngs of believers, as well as the powers of our Lord and Savior Himself, and the spirits of the saints—I think both of those who have already fallen asleep and clearly of those who are still alive, even though it is not easy to say how. Concerning angels, we must reason this way. Suppose the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him, and delivers them (Ps. 34:7); and suppose Jacob tells the truth not only about himself but also about all those who rely on God when he says to the understanding person, “The angel who delivers me from all these evils” (Gen. 48:16). It is likely, then, that when a great number of people are assembled genuinely for the glory of Christ, each one’s angel, who is around those who fear Him, encamps with that man whom he is believed to guard and order. As a result, when the saints are gathered together, there is a double Church, one of men and the other of angels.”<sup>667</sup>

He again says, “I have no doubt that the angels are in the midst of our gatherings, not only in the collective church but also in every individual church, in every church that has those who were spoken about that, ‘their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven’ (Matt 18:10). Therefore, we have a twofold church here, one of humans and the other of angels. If what we are saying is logical and is in line with Scripture, so the angels rejoice and pray alongside us. Since the angels are in the church, meaning in the church that deserves their presence, it is appropriate then for women who are praying to cover their heads because of the angels (1 Cor 11:10).”

**St. Anthony** speaks of heavenly providence saying, “When you close the doors of your dwelling and are alone, you should know that there is present with you the angel whom God has appointed for each man; the Greeks call him the personal daemon. This angel, who is sleepless and cannot be deceived, is always present with you; he sees all things and is not hindered by darkness. You should know, too, that with him is God, who is in every place; for

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<sup>666</sup> Ibid. 5, 4. See also *Hom. in Num.*, 11.5; *Hom. in Lev.*, 9.8. Hilary has this testimony to give: “There is positive grounds to the teaching (*auctoritas absoluta*) that the angels preside over the prayers of the faithful. They offer to God every day the prayers of those who have been saved” (*Comm. in Matt.*, 18.5). See also Tract. Ps. 129.

<sup>667</sup> Origen, “On Prayer” in *Origen, An Exhortation to Martyrdom: Prayer, First Principles: Book IV, Prologue to the Commentary on the Song of Songs, Homily XXVII on Numbers*, trans. Rowan A. Greer (NY: Paulist Press, 1979) 31.5: p. 166–167.



there is no place and nothing material in which God is not, since He is greater than all things and holds all men in His hand.”<sup>668</sup>

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<sup>668</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life” (attributed to St. Anthony) in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 329–356; 62: p. 338.



## 3

**The Order of the Heavenly Hosts****1138. Are there characteristics that are common to all the heavenly ranks?**

There are some general characteristics common to the heavenly hosts, such that they are united in perfect harmony together and we can call them the heavenly choir. Overall, this harmonious choir is comprised of at least nine ranks, each with its own name and distinguishing features. Every rank or choir has a special name and special features that distinguish it from other ranks. And each member of a rank also has unique features that distinguish it from other members of the same rank.

**St. Anthony the Great** says, “Therefore all these names have been imposed on them after the deeds of each one. Some of them are called archangels, some thrones and dominions, principalities, powers and cherubim. These names are given to them since they kept the will of their Creator. But due to the wickedness of the conduct of others it was necessary to name them devil and satan, after their own evil conduct. Others are called demons, evil and impure spirits, spirits of seduction and powers of this world, and there are many other varieties among them. But there are also those who have opposed them in this heavy body in which we dwell—some of them are called patriarchs, and some prophets and kings and priests and judges and apostles, and there are many other chosen after their good conduct. All these names are given to them, whether male or female, for the sake of the variety of their deeds and in conformity with their own minds, but they are all from one (source).”<sup>669</sup>

**1139. Can we distinguish between the heavenly ranks?**

Among the nine heavenly ranks we find many common features that make it difficult to distinguish them, especially since spiritual beings do not have a physical body like ours. They are also beyond our minds. They all enjoy the divine presence, and the shining of the divine light upon them. They all participate in a heavenly chorus that praises and glorifies God in a splendid way.

**1140. What do we learn from the book, “The Celestial Hierarchy”?**

This book, supposedly written by Dionysius **the Areopagite**,<sup>670</sup> has made it clear that “God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Cor. 14:33). Therefore, the heavens and

<sup>669</sup> St. Anthony the Great, *The Letters of St. Antony*, trans., Samuel Rubenson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) 6.57–62; p. 220.

<sup>670</sup> Dionysius the Areopagite: Probably an author from the fifth/sixth century in Syria. He wrote in Greek and attributed his writings to Dionysius the Areopagite (Acts 17:34) in order to give his writings an apostolic and traditional authority. He is a Christian theologian, influenced by Neo-Platonism, and mysticism. He succeeded in publishing writings that had a clear impact on many theologians, mystics, and poets in the

their inhabitants must enjoy a specific order. It is evident that they come together periodically, as is evident from the passage in the book of Job (1:6; 2:1). They gathered during creation in awe to glorify and praise the Creator (Job 38:7). The Psalmist speaks of their gatherings. The precision of organization is evident in the battle between the Archangel Michael and his angels against Satan and his angels (Rev. 12:7–9). To this day, some scholars still employ the system of classifying the ranks of angels that we find in this book, especially given that the texts of some traditional liturgies employ it.

The book refers to the nine ranks, each with a name that refers to its role and function. In the third chapter of the book, the author mentions that the order of the heavenly hosts is a sacred order in which the heavenly beings enjoy the divine presence according to their merits, so that they imitate God and reflect His divine beauty. Thus He bestows His perfect goodness, unity, and harmony on them.

In the sixth chapter, he says that **only the Divine Creator knows exactly the number of these exalted heavenly beings, their nature, and their ranks**. Further, we would know nothing about them if God had not told us through His heavenly servants, who know something of their nature. That is why we ought not to imagine things about them, but to speak instead only that which was declared to us, according to our ability to understand, through the angelic visions that revered theologians have seen. The author also says that all the heavenly hosts could be called “angels” (which means “messengers”), because all the hosts are creatures that are more exalted than any rational or irrational earthly creature:

“They have the first and the most diverse participation in the divine [light] and they, in turn, provide the first and the most diverse revelations of the divine hiddenness. That is why they have a preeminent right to the title of angel or messenger, since it is they who first are granted the divine enlightenment and it is they who pass on to us these revelations which are so far beyond us. Indeed the Word of God teaches us that the Law was given to us by the angels ... Before the days of the Law and after it had come, it was the angels who uplifted our illustrious ancestors toward the divine and they did so by prescribing roles of conduct, by turning them from wandering and sin to the right way of truth, or by coming to announce and explain sacred orders, hidden visions, or transcendent mysteries, or divine prophecies.”<sup>671</sup>

The author of this book believes that the angelic ranks are divided into three ranks, and each rank includes three hosts:

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East and the West, such as Maximus the Confessor, Pope Gregory the Great, Andrew of Crete, John Scotus Eriugena, Bonaventure, Albert the Great, the author of the book *The Unknown Cloud*, Dante Weichert, John Taylor, and John Milton.

<sup>671</sup> “The Celestial Hierarchy” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., C. Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987) 4.2 (180B): p. 157.

**The first rank** (Chapter 7) are more attached to God, and more exalted than all the others. It includes three hosts: The **seraphim** full of eyes, and with many wings; the **cherubim**, and the **thrones**.

**The second rank** (Chapter 8) includes three hosts: the **dominions** (or **lordships**), the **powers**, and the **authorities**.

**The third rank** (Chapter 9) includes three hosts: the **principalities**, the **archangels**, and the **angels**.

**Bar Hebraeus** believes that these three groups are more like heavenly churches: **the first church** includes the seraphim, the cherubim and the thrones; who together resemble the divine throne. In Ezekiel we read that the seraphim are the chariots of God and Psalms say: “You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth” (Ps. 80:1), and, “The Lord reigns, let the peoples tremble. He dwells between the cherubim. Let the earth be moved” (Ps. 99:1). **The second church** includes the lordships, the powers, and the dominions. **The third church** includes the principalities, the archangels, and the angels.

In the Old Testament, the high priest would bear twelve precious stones on his shoulders. The first nine stones represent the angelic hosts. The first row: sardius representing the fiery seraphim; topaz representing the knowledgeable cherubim; and emerald representing the thrones (Ex. 28:17). The second row: turquoise, sapphire, and diamond (Ex. 28:18). The third row: jacinth, agate, and amethyst (Ex. 28:19). The fourth row represents the human Church united with the angelic Church, and is composed of beryl, onyx, and jasper; representing the three ranks of priesthood: the bishops, the priests, and the deacons.

In the Liturgy of St. Gregory, we pray:

“You are He whom the **angels** praise and the **archangels** worship.

“You are He whom the **principalities** bless and to whom the **dominions** cry.

“You are He whose glory the **authorities** declare.

“You are He unto whom the **thrones** send up the honor.

“Thousands of thousands stand before You and ten thousand times ten thousand offer You service.

“You are He around whom stand the **cherubim** and the **seraphim**: six wings to the one and six wings to the other, with two they cover their faces and with two they cover their feet, and with two they fly. And one cries to another.”

And in the **Liturgy of St. Cyril** (of St. Mark) we pray: “You are He before whom stand Your **two most honored creatures**, with their six wings and many eyes, the seraphim and the cherubim.”

And in the Trisagion of the divine liturgy of **St. Sarapion**: “Beside you stand thousands of thousands and myriads of myriads of angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, and powers. Beside you stand the two most honorable seraphim with six wings ...”<sup>672</sup>

**St. Irenaeus** discusses the idea that there are seven hosts of angels.<sup>673</sup>

**1141. What do we know about the first rank, which includes the seraphim, the cherubim, and the thrones?**

The first rank is closest to God and is the most exalted. It includes three hosts: the **seraphim** — full of eyes and with six wings — the **cherubim**; and the **thrones**. They are all equal in rank, their likeness to God is more perfect than any other, and they are directly united with the primal light of divinity.

**1142. What do we know about the seraphim?674**

The word “seraphim” is the plural of the word “seraph” which means “aflame with fire,” for they reflect the divine light that shines upon them. Being the highest among the heavenly hosts, they continuously praise and glorify God who is all-holy, all-perfect, just, merciful, and wise. This rank calls the whole creation to continuously draw near to the Holy One, through a life of holiness, praise, and joy (Isa. 6:3).

Here, we see the role hymns play in the Church in enabling us to imitate the seraphim and strive to encounter the Holy One and enjoy fellowship with Him, that we might come to bear the righteousness of Christ within us with thanksgiving and joy over God’s work in us and in the whole creation.

One of the seraphim took a coal from the heavenly altar with tongs (Isa. 6:6) and touched Isaiah’s lips with it so that the prophet would be purified and qualified to bear witness to the Lord. This flaming coal resembles the Body of Christ of which we partake in the eucharist to inflame our inner being with the fire of the divine love, and so that we become like the angels who burn with the fire of the love of God and of desire for the salvation of the world. These flaming servants strongly desire us to be illuminated by the Holy One, so that our hearts may be inflamed with holy fire that abolishes every darkness within us, and that we

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<sup>672</sup> See “The Prayers of Sarapion” (of Thmuis) in R. C. D Jasper and Cuming, G. J., *Prayers of the Eucharist: Early and Reformed* (Collegeville Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1990): p. 77.

<sup>673</sup> See St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* (ANF 1).

<sup>674</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, Malaty, *The Book of Isaiah*, trans., George Botros, Nora El-Agamy (Orange California: Coptic Orthodox Christian Center, 2002) Chapter 6.

may be granted enlightenment, knowledge of the divine mysteries, wisdom from above, permanent steadfastness, and continuous growth in our resemblance to God.<sup>675</sup>

Isaiah saw the seraphim (Isa. 6:1) in the year that King Uzziah died, who had reigned over Judah for fifty-two years, since he was just sixteen years old. During his reign, he did what was right in the eyes of God and was successful in all that he did. But when he became great, he fell into pride and wanted to offer incense to the Lord on the altar of incense himself. As a result, he was struck with leprosy when he was in the temple and the priests expelled him. He was isolated in a house far from the palace until the day of his death (2 Chron. 26:16–21).

Isaiah was deeply saddened by the fall of King Uzziah in his last days. When the prophet looked at the people, he saw them scattered like sheep without a shepherd, for their king had become unclean and unable to carry out his royal functions. Isaiah realized that the people were in need of heavenly care because no human being could satisfy their needs, as the Psalmist says: “Do not put your trust in princes, nor in a son of man ... his spirit departs, he returns to his earth” (Ps. 146:3–4). Amid this bitterness, the Lord showed this vision to Isaiah to comfort him. The vision most probably took place in the temple at a time when the prophet Isaiah was alone in private worship and was crying out to God to care for His people.

The Lord appeared to him sitting on a high and elevated throne, to assure him that He is the heavenly Shepherd, and that His thoughts are above human thoughts and His ways are above human ways. **St John Chrysostom** says, “They cried to one another and said: Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of armies ... He shows us that, although this vision was only a shadow, an act of condescension, yet the celestial powers themselves were incapable of rising to that height of God which was lowering. For if they hid their feet and their backs, it was because they were frightened, that they dreaded splendor, that they could not endure the brilliancy which issued from the throne. So they made themselves as a bulwark of their wings to darken the brilliance of this vision; they felt what we feel when thunder roars and lightning shines, and we bend down to the earth. Now, if the seraphim, these great and admirable powers, could not look with trembling God sitting and seated on a throne, if they hid the face and the feet, who will say the madness of those who boast to know perfectly God, who make curious inquiries on this immortal nature? They claim that they can see Him clearly without any limitation!”<sup>676</sup>

And St. John Chrysostom continues: “Indeed God, even to those hosts, is imperceivable and unapproachable, yet He condescends to appear in the way described in the vision ... God who is not limited by place; but by His love for us, appears sitting on a throne, surrounded by heavenly hosts.”<sup>677</sup>

<sup>675</sup> Cf. “The Celestial Hierarchy” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., C. Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987) Chapter 8.

<sup>676</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Isaiah 2.2–3*, trans., John Litteral.

<sup>677</sup> Cf. Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *St. John Chrysostom* (Arabic), (1988): p. 299.

Again, he says, “The visions seen by the prophets are never visions of God’s very essence, for if they had seen His essence, they would not have seen Him in different forms. He is simple, without form or body and He does not sit, stand up, or walk.”<sup>678</sup>

When the servant beholds the service of the angels, he is comforted by knowing that the troubles and weaknesses of the Church will certainly come to an end one day and she will praise together with the heavenly hosts eternally. Here, the Church is an icon of heaven, enjoying a taste of this heavenly service. In a certain homily in Coptic, the Church is defined as “A place of consolation, a place of meeting of angels, and a place of the cherubim and the seraphim.”<sup>679</sup> It is said that **St. Pachomius** would see the church filled with angels.

The work of every servant or prophet in the Church is to attract every soul to the Lord, that it may become a throne where He can dwell and establish His inner kingdom, till it becomes like a heavenly seraph, burning like fire. Each seraph has six wings: with two he covers his face as a sign of the fear of God, since he cannot comprehend the fullness of divine brilliance; and with two he covers his feet as a sign of modesty; and with two he flies, soaring in the heavens. While the cherubim carry the divine throne, the seraphim flutter around the throne, crying to one another, declaring that God is “Holy, Holy, Holy,” and that His glory fills all the earth (Isa. 6:3).

Some people believe that the seraphim proclaim the holiness of God in order to draw the minds of human beings towards taking their own holiness seriously, so they may be able to draw closer to the One who is Himself Holy. The believer is called to follow the example of the prophet Isaiah, who accepted the live coal from the altar of God, brought to him by a seraph with tongs, with which he touched his lips and purged his sins (Isa. 6:6–7).

### **1143. What do we know about the cherubim?**

The word “cherubim” is the plural of the word “cherub.” We find the term “cherub” in the Bible before any reference to the heavenly hosts, when the Lord sets him as a guardian over Paradise so that Adam and Eve cannot not reach the tree of life after they fell into sin (Gen. 3:24).

The Old Testament nowhere says that the cherubim had any mission involving humanity, or that they serve us in any way; other than that the cherubim simply intercede on our behalf. They are close to God, distinguished by the knowledge of God and continuously praise Him without lukewarmness or ceasing. The cherubim are mentioned in the Holy Bible seventy-two times, whereas the seraphim are mentioned only in Isaiah’s vision (Chapter 6) where this vision inflames his heart to embark upon his service for the sake of God’s kingdom. This

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<sup>678</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *St. John Chrysostom* (Arabic), (1988): p. 32.

<sup>679</sup> Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Church, the House of God*, rev., Nabieh Fanous, Riad Habib, Nermine Morcos, Mary Hanna, and Lilian Hanna (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1994): p. 205.



filled him with hope in the work of God, rather than that of humans. The cherubim are rich in **knowledge** and overflow with wisdom. They are portrayed as chariots of God who carry His divine throne.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** agrees with the Jewish Philo of Alexandria that the word, “cherub” means “knowledge” for through true spiritual knowledge, we become like chariots carrying God, enjoying the vision of God.

**St. Jerome** believes that a cherub is a symbol of the wealth of knowledge, at work in our nature, to elevate it to be among the heavenly powers. This knowledge works in our nature in four ways: like a **lion**, it exercises authority over our lusts; like an **eagle**, it soars high among elevated matters; like an **ox**, it strives in labor; and like a **wise human** behaves with wisdom in the Lord.<sup>680</sup> This knowledge is granted to us when we live the life of the Gospel, indeed, of the four gospels, as St. Jerome says, “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John are the Lord’s quartet — the true cherubim are the storehouse of knowledge, for their bodies are filled with eyes that sparkle like lightning ... their legs are straight and tall (Ezek. 1:7), their backs are winged and ready to fly in all directions (Ezek. 1:9). Every one of them holds onto the other as they walk according to the breath of the Holy Spirit (Ezek. 1:20).”<sup>681</sup>

#### 1144. What does St. Jacob of Sarug say about the cherubim as the chariot of God?

He says, “In the prophecy, it is written that God rode upon the cherubim and flew ... The cherubim are joined to God. If He forsook them, they would collide and fall. It is He who upholds them that they may fly swiftly. His great strength carries the cherubim who carry Him. He carries the whole world — who can carry Him? The whole creation depends upon His hidden signal, and He controls it. What chariot is sufficient to convey Him? He is above the heights and beneath the depths and embraces all things. Such a chariot falls short of His great power by all accounts, for it is He who upholds the creation and does not let it fall.”

He also says, “He is not borne by the cherubim or by any chariot. But for the sake of His economy, He joins it to Himself, for the sake of the mysteries to which it is joined. He set aside a place for it that it may dwell in its own realm; that the exalted ranks might draw near to it with praise ... **He fashioned for Himself something like a palanquin, that He may appear upon it, and that all may gather before it and delight in its appearance** ... The multitudes crowd around the door of the Great King. Myriads of myriads serve Him, each according to their kind; and they send up to Him voices of glory indeed. Fear-inspiring glory and brilliance emanate from the chariot and unite the heavenly creatures to the great Glory.

“They stand, rank upon rank, serving Him. He beholds all their soldiers gathered in one place. And the eyes of the children of light rest upon the chariot, inclining neither this way nor that way away from the vision of glory. The cherubim who bear Him rejoice and the

<sup>680</sup> See St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* Homily 7 (FOTC 48:54).

<sup>681</sup> St. Jerome, *On Ps.*, hom 10.

seraphim are sanctified when they behold Him in the realm of the Holy. He delights in the ranks of the heavenly as though they are at the door of the royal house. All of them cry out, rejoicing in the vision of His exalted place ... In the brilliance of His light, the multitude delight in His blessings. The powers and the rulers of the powers glorify Him with all their lives. For they were made worthy to behold, in His exalted realm ... All of them attend closely to this hidden place, which He chose as the place of His rest. They cry out, glorifying His honor. The ranks of the heavenly confess as they are arrayed before His chariot. The cherubim bless Him, being joined to Him and carrying Him. And the multitudes glorify Him, for they have gathered together for His glorification ... All these benefit from their connection with the chariot, but He has no need for a chariot.”

#### **1145. Why did God appoint a cherub to guard the way to Paradise?**

The cherub is closely related to our salvation. He appears in the earliest books of the Holy Bible, holding a flaming sword to guard the way to paradise, so that whoever rebels against God cannot reach the tree of life (Gen. 3:24); for the fallen nature of man is incapable of approaching the mystery of life. The cherub bears no hatred for humanity, but, together with the twenty-four presbyters, they sing together with us the praise of the Lamb, which is the song of our salvation (Rev. 5:9).

God set a powerful guard around the Garden of Eden and appointed to this task an angel from one of the highest ranks in heaven, thus urging us to appreciate the danger of rebelling against God, and to know that reconciliation between God and humanity requires divine intervention.

I now quote the poetic account of **St. Jacob of Sarug** about an imagined encounter between Dimas the thief on the right hand of Christ who went to Paradise (Luke 23:39–43), and the cherub who guards Paradise:

“While [the thief] was breaking in through the foundations of the great flames,  
A cherub met him and questioned him in wonder.

He said to him: O man, who are you? Where are you from?  
How did you come along this path of terrifying flames?

How did the winds carry you on their shoulders?  
Why have the buffeting flames not consumed your weakness?

How did you traverse the great winds filled with fire?  
How did you pass through the billows of flame without burning?

O you who are scattered dust, who helped you to rest upon the storms?  
How were you not destroyed by their violence?

How did your feet tread upon the flames,  
And not be melted by its boiling heat?

O grain of dust, how did you sail on the ocean of fire;  
Your dirt falling between the waves without disintegrating?

Are you Adam molded by the hands of divinity?  
Or the brilliant Seth (Gen. 4:26) surrounded by the mysteries of the One?

The thief cried out: O son of the flames, do not be angry!  
I will tell you who I am, and who sent me.

I am a thief who behaved vilely,  
and bathed in the blood of others on the roads.

I snatched treasures from traders and hoarded them.  
I made rulers needy because of the treasures [I stole from them].

I killed with death and bathed in human blood.  
I tortured elders and felt no pity for young men.

I barricaded roads against passing travelers,  
And traders cowered in the shelter of their homes, [deprived of] their profits.

I deprived countless people of their wealth,  
And in the wilderness I swam in wickedness as one swims in water.

On hearing this startling discourse, the fiery cherub was confused. He summoned the awesome fiery multitudes with trembling. The vigilant [cherub] and the powers said together: O unclean man, what are you doing in this pure place? O you who are bloodstained, what path brought you here and how did the billows of fire not sweep you away as you traveled? O thief of treasures, our race's home cannot be stolen. O killer of people, there is no way to kill the vigilant [heavenly creatures]. O exploiter of the free, you cannot plunder the vigilant. Consider now, and go back to your own place, lest their wings burn you ... Behold the key to the kingdom: who can remove it? And the wall of fire, you cannot take its foundations by storm. The spear of fire flares up and instills fear. If you are insolent enough to approach, O weak grass, it will annihilate you. O man of dust, you disdained the flames, yet the fearful waves of fire did not sweep you away.

The thief replied to the child of flame: O you who are spirit, hear me as I tell you the truth. I was a thief, but mercy has fished me out of vice and washed away the evils with which I was stained. I would commit evil all the day long, but mercy caught me up in the net of repentance in the evening. My evil deeds drew me to die on a tree [a cross], but through repentance, mercy drew me to inherit life (Luke 23:42). The King, your Lord, granted me life, for I confessed His name, and He opened before me the door of light, that I may enter Eden. O you who are spirit, you ought to rejoice over him who was lost and has now returned,

for your Lord rejoices over him ... All the vigilant [angels] rejoice over one sinner who repents, and those of the right hand exult, for he becomes an heir with them (Luke 7:15). And you, are you sad? Why? Because I have come, and the Son of the King and His powers rejoice over my return?”<sup>682</sup>

#### **1146. Why were two golden cherubim placed upon the Ark of the Covenant?**

Two golden cherubim were placed over the Ark of the Covenant in the Tabernacle of Meeting and in the temple (Ex. 25:17–22). The Ark of the Covenant is also called “the mercy seat” as it represents the throne of God, full of mercy towards His children. And above it were two cherubim, one at each end, with their wings stretched upward and facing each other. On each side were two golden rings; and poles of acacia wood overlaid with gold were slid through the rings with which they carried the Ark. The children of Kohath were entrusted to guard and carry the ark (Num. 3:29–31).

The two cherubim represent divine glory and divine presence. God would speak to Moses from above them. The presence of the two cherubim above the Ark of the Covenant indicates that God, who dwells among His people, speaks to them and deals with them with mercy and love. The presence of two cherubim also helps us to understand the role of the heavenly beings toward us: praying for us and ministering to those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14).

The two cherubim are a symbol of our access to heavenly creatures and of our fellowship with the cherubim and seraphim in their praise and liturgy. The Lord said to Moses: “And there I will meet with you from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim which are on the ark of the Testimony, about everything which I will give you in commandment to the children of Israel” (Ex. 25:22).

As for the appearance of clouds between the two cherubim when God was present there, and the accompanying sound and the appearance of a sky-blue color around the two cherubim (Ezek. 1:26) — all these point to the eschatological<sup>683</sup> nature of our liturgy at the new altar, and its heavenly character. The figure of a cherub was depicted on the curtains of the tent and on the veil (Ex. 26–31) as a winged human, showing the closeness of human nature to the divine presence.

#### **1147. Why did God grant the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the divine chariot?**

Ezekiel reached the legal age to commence his priestly duties, such as entering the sanctuary, offering sacrifices, participating in daily liturgies, celebrating feasts, and enjoying the joyful praises. However, he was deprived of all this because he was in the land of captivity; so he would sit on the banks of the River Chebar, mourning the condition of his

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<sup>682</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Homily 177 On the Cherub and the Thief*.

<sup>683</sup> Eschatology refers to matters after the consummation of this world; matters of the world to come.

nation, his people, and the temple of the Lord. While there, he was granted a vision of the glory of God in which four living creatures appeared (Ezek. 1:1, 28). He described these living creatures as being cherubim (Ezek. 10:4, 18–22). In the midst of the bitterness of soul of this priest and prophet, the Spirit lifted him up to the heavens and brought him to the heavenly Jerusalem to delight in the everlasting temple. He did not see the ark of the covenant, the golden menorah, or the altar of incense, etc.; but he saw instead the fiery divine chariot, and the fiery divine throne. The heavens were opened before him so that he might enter before the throne of the almighty God. He came to realize that human affairs do not come about randomly, but by the wondrous governance of God. The almighty God cares for every detail that concerns the life of humanity, and this is the secret of our consolation even in the midst of tribulation.

In captivity, the people’s spirit had been broken, especially because the Chaldeans paraded their god Bel or Marduk<sup>684</sup> through the streets of the capital city with pomp and splendor, while the Israelites were deprived of their temple and their songs of praise. Their own defeat therefore seemed to be the defeat of their God. Therefore, God did not manifest Himself to them in a simple burning bush as He had done with Moses (Ex. 3:2), but in the form of a fiery chariot full of glory and splendor. For God wished to assure His prophet and His people that His glory fills heaven and earth even in the times when His people are handed over to captivity for chastisement.

In the Book of Revelation, St. John saw only one face for each living creature (Rev. 4:6–7). But the prophet Ezekiel said that he saw four faces for each living creature; one face on each side. Perhaps the reason for this is that St. John saw these creatures from only one side and they did not turn around; while the prophet Ezekiel saw them from all sides as the chariot moved around?

**1148. How did He who sits upon the Cherubim come to be in a manger and in the embrace of St. Mary?**

The heart of **St. Jacob of Sarug** burned with the desire to flee and enjoy the vision of Him who sits upon the cherubim. Yet, at the same time, his thoughts fled to the manger to behold Him in the embrace of St. Mary. He said:

“Where among the ways of the mind can it flee to search for You?  
 What paths are suitable for words to take that they may encounter Your glories?  
 Where can You be found? On the chariot? (Ezek. 1:26) or with Mary?  
 With Your Heavenly Father or with Joseph in the land of Judah?

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<sup>684</sup> The name “Bel” corresponds to the Hebrew “Baal.” He was the god of Chaldean nation and the chief god in Babylon. He was also called “Marduk,” the god of the sun and of the spring season.

In the bosom of Your Father or are you in truth in bosom of Mary?  
With the mother according to the flesh or on the crystal throne (Ezek. 1:22, Rev. 4:6)?

Shall You be found on the fiery wings with mystical feathers (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10)  
or borne on Your mother's arms?

Shall I behold You on the cherubim  
or shall I behold Your splendor abiding on the knees of the faithful woman (Luke 1:45)?

Is Your brilliance in the multitude of the glittering bursts of flame  
or in the poor swaddling clothes in the manger (Luke 2:7)?"

**1149. What do we know about the “seats” or “thrones”?**

The Holy Bible does not tell us anything about them, other than including their names among the list of heavenly beings: “For by Him [Christ] all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones** or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him” (Col. 1:16). They share their exalted nature with the seraphim and the cherubim and thus are closer to the divine throne than other ranks.

They are called “full of eyes,” indicating their complete glory and honor and their complete isolation from anything earthly or base. They abide in complete power with all steadfastness and perfection. Their foundations are on high. They are receptive to the divine mind above all else and are focused upon communion with God. Therefore, they reveal God.

**Pope Gregory the Great** says, “What is the **throne** of God but the angelic spirits, of whom the Holy Bible testifies that they are called **thrones**? Who desires to draw near to the throne of God except him who longs to be among the angelic spirits ... he is lifted up to dwell in glory and contemplate eternity.”

**1150. What do we know about how the chariot of the four living creatures moves?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says the following about the way they move, which is difficult for us to explain: “You will be mightily filled with surprise, in awe of this fearful chariot, let alone by the Charioteer; for He is the Son of God. It is difficult for you to hear, and difficult for me to speak, for the matters of the seraphim cannot be explained. Four living creatures for the four directions of the cosmos are bound together. Each living creature emerges, one by one, without colliding. The one facing the east speeds towards the east that lies before him; the one facing the west speeds towards the west as he must; the one facing the south hastens without turning; and the one facing the north, to the north he proceeds with great power. If the leader proceeds in a direction, all follow him without confusion; all pursue towards the

four directions, bound together ... whoever dares to [attempt to] explain such astounding matters makes himself a laughing stock, and exposes his lack of knowledge.”

### **1151. Why does the Holy Bible mention the four living creatures in both Testaments?**

In both the Testaments of the Holy Bible we find visions concerning these exalted creatures who are attached to the divine throne (Isa. 6:1–7; Ex. 26:1; 36:8; Ezek. 1:1–14; Rev. 4:6–9) so that the desire to imitate these creatures by divine grace may abide in the heart of the Church.

### **1152. What are the characteristics of the four living creatures?**

“Around the throne, were four living creatures”<sup>685</sup> (Rev. 4:6). These are the two hosts of the seraphim and the cherubim, whose intercession the Church always seeks. The Church celebrates their memorial feast on the eighth of Hathor, and calls them the incorporeal creatures, bearing the chariot of God.<sup>686</sup> They bear the following characteristics:

- a. **Dignity:** **St. John Chrysostom** says of them: “I say to you, beloved children, none is like them in honor, whether in heaven or on earth, for they carry the throne of God; yet they cannot look at the living eternal Face. Created from light and fire, mighty, extremely fierce, they ask God to forgive the sins of humanity and to have mercy on them ... Isaiah the prophet beheld their glory and proclaimed their honor (Isa. 6:1–3), as did Ezekiel the prophet (Ezek. 1:4–28) and David, the father of prophets and father of Christ according to the flesh, as he said in his psalm: “He bowed the heaven and came down, with darkness under His feet. He rode upon a cherub and flew; He flew upon the wings of the wind” (Ps. 18:9–10).”
- b. They are without priestly thrones or crowns, for the Lord is their crown and they are His chariot.
- c. According to **Ibn Al-Assal**, they are “full of eyes all around” indicating their awareness of both present and future mysteries that the Lord reveals to them.
- d. “Each of them has six wings” — we praise God saying, “You are He around whom stand the cherubim and the seraphim, six wings to the one, and six wings to the other; with two they cover their faces, and with two they cover their feet, and with two they fly; and one cries to another, sending up the hymn of victory and salvation which is ours, with a voice full of glory.”<sup>687</sup> Therefore it is fitting for a priest to follow their example, to cover his face with fear and trembling, to cover his feet with hope and

<sup>685</sup> Some translations render this as “the four living animals.” To avoid the error of thinking that physical, irrational animals are intended here, the more common translation “living creatures” is to be preferred.

This also is in keeping with the practice of all the fathers, such as Irenaeus, Athanasius, and Victorinus.

<sup>686</sup> The Coptic Doxology of the Four Living Creatures (or Bodiless Creatures).

<sup>687</sup> Liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian.

confidence, and to let his heart soar with love and praise before the Lord who was slain for our sake.

**St. John Chrysostom** advises us saying: “I, John, your poor father, beseech you my beloved children, priests, and deacons that you do not approach the altar while being impure, but keep your bodies and souls pure if you desire to draw near the pure service. For you are like the heavenly seraphim who do not dare to look at the face of the living God, but stand before Him with faces bowed down, covered with their wings. O servants, you behold the body of the Son of God and His precious blood on the pure altar; you touch Him and eat Him while acknowledging the great honor that befits them. So, you must stand with joyful faces, fearful hearts, bowed heads, and eyes looking down; for you are like the cherubim and the seraphim who carry the great throne.”

Again, he says, “So when you conceive of the seraphim flying around that lofty and exalted throne, projecting their wings to block their eyes and cover their feet, their backs, and their faces, and uttering a cry full of amazement (cf. Isa. 6:1–2)—do not suppose that they have feathers and feet and wings. For these powers are invisible. But through these images, consider the unapproachableness and incomprehensibility of Him Who sits upon the throne. Truly He is unapproachable and incomprehensible even to them, and yet He consents to lower Himself; for He did not appear then in the way that He is. God does not sit, nor is He encompassed by a throne or enclosed by a place. But even if He was seated and sitting on a throne, with the angels flying around—all of which are signs of condescension, since He does not really sit—they were not able to see Him. Rather, being unable to bear the brilliant light shooting forth from Him, blocking their eyes by projecting their wings, they only gave praise, they only sang with great awe, offering the sacred song that proclaims His holiness. Will you not slink away and sink into the ground and hide, you who with such eagerness wish to pry into the providence of God, Whose power is ineffable, inexpressible, and inapprehensible by the powers above?”<sup>688</sup>

- e. **Their form:** They are incorporeal and invisible forces, but they appeared to John the beloved and the prophet Ezekiel thus: “The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle” (Rev. 4:7).

The four living creatures have also been interpreted symbolically in a number of ways:

**First: St. John Chrysostom** says: “God made them to intercede on behalf of humanity and the rest of the creation — beasts, cattle, and birds of the air — for they are closer to Him than all the heavenly hosts.”

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<sup>688</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On the Providence of God by St. John Chrysostom* (St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 2015) 3: pp. 42–43.



**Second: St. Gregory of Nazianzus** and the scholar **Origen** see these creatures who carry the throne of God as symbols of the four faculties of the soul, sanctified by the Lamb of God. These faculties are: anger, whose symbol is the lion; (holy) desire, whose symbol is the ox; speech, whose symbol is the one with a face like that of a man; and spirituality, whose symbol is the soaring eagle.

**Third: St. Jerome** sees in them a symbol of the redemptive work of the Lord: the one with a face like that of a man is a symbol of the incarnation; the ox is a symbol of Him who was led to the slaughter on the cross; the lion is a symbol of the resurrection; and the eagle is a symbol of the ascension.

**Fourth: St. Irenaeus**<sup>689</sup> also sees in them a symbol of Christ's work of redemption: the one with a face like that of a man is a symbol of His incarnation; the ox is a symbol of His sacrificial and priestly roles, since He intercedes for us; the lion is a symbol of His royal authority; and the eagle is a symbol of His sending of the Holy Spirit.

**Fifth:** the scholar **Origen** sees in the harmony of the four faces together (the lion, the eagle, the ox, and the human) a symbol of the restoration of sanctified living creatures to their original tame nature. In the Messianic era, the wolf shall dwell with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the goat; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox (Isa. 11:7). This perfect harmony will be realized at the second coming of Christ.

**Sixth:** The four creatures are a symbol of the Holy Church, carrying the divine life within her, and these four are the bishops, priests, deacons, and laity who are the chief pillars that work together for the sake of the Lord Christ. Any weakness in any of the pillars causes the Church to lose her balance and harms her mission.

**Seventh:** These heavenly creatures invite us to have the face of a lion, the face of a man, the face of an ox, and to fly with the spiritual eagle:

- a. The faithful ought to behave with a **royal spirit like a lion**, not fearing Satan or being terrified of sin; for the Savior has given us authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and upon all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19).
- b. We should cherish the spirit of our adoption by God and delight in the inner kingdom of God and our partaking of the divine nature. All these things encourage us to remember that **we are humans**, that we may hear the Lord's words: "Learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29).
- c. As believers, we ought to imitate the Lord, the Savior of the world, by practicing spiritual priesthood in our constant prayers for all humanity, even for those who oppose the truth and for enemies, and to be willing to **sacrifice ourselves (like an ox)**.

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<sup>689</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8 (ANF 1:428).

- d. As for the eagle, as believers, we ought to fly with the apostle Paul, **soar high amidst the matters of heaven**, and grow in glory day by day. We will be like an eagle borne on powerful wings to the heights, seeing from afar with keen sight, and able to perceive divine mysteries, according to one's spiritual level.

**Eighth:** Many early Fathers saw in the four living creatures a symbol of the four evangelists, although there was some variation in how they applied this symbolism. **St. Irenaeus** says, "It is not possible that the Gospels can be either more or fewer in number than they are. For, since there are four zones of the world in which we live, and four principal winds, while the Church is scattered throughout all the world, and the pillar and ground (1 Tim. 3:15) of the Church is the Gospel and the spirit of life; it is fitting that she should have four pillars, breathing out immortality on every side, and vivifying men afresh. From which fact, it is evident that the Word, the Artificer of all, He that sits upon the cherubim, and contains all things, He who was manifested to men, has given us the Gospel under four aspects, but bound together by one Spirit."<sup>690</sup>

### **1153. What do we know about the twenty-four presbyters (Rev. 4:4)?**

The words "priest" or "elder," or the Greek-derived word "presbyter," refer to priestly ministry. Thus, the early Church understood the twenty-four priests to be a priestly rank among the ranks of heaven, dedicated a day for their commemoration, and considered them to be at the forefront of the heavenly hosts, second only to the four living creatures.

We get a sense of their importance in the early Church from the words of **St. Cyril of Jerusalem**: "The Fathers commanded all Christians to commemorate them when they witnessed their dignity and elevated glory. They are incorporeal, for they are close to God the Pantocrator, before Him at all times, interceding for the whole creation, crying out with the four living creatures saying, "holy, holy, holy" ... What is more noble than this position of which they are counted worthy? The angels and all the heavenly hosts stand before the just Judge, but they are seated on luminous thrones, clothed in regal attire, with crowns of honor upon their heads, holding golden censors in their hands filled with the prayers of the saints; and they bow down before the true Lamb, asking Him for the forgiveness of the sins of humanity. They never cease their praise and rejoicing before the Lord of Sabaoth (Hosts) together with the four living creatures ..."

However, according to **St. Ambrose**, we ought not to think of descriptions of the thrones and those sitting on them in a material way but only as mere expressions of their exalted honor and joy.<sup>691</sup> According to **Ibn Al-Assal**, their white attire indicates their splendor, glory, righteousness, and holiness. **Victorinus of Pettau** believes that these priests are heavenly beings and at the same time are symbols of the prophets of the Old Testament who surround

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<sup>690</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 3.11.8 (ANF 1:428).

<sup>691</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 5.6.73 (NPNF II/10:294).

the Lord, proclaiming by the spirit of prophecy, His incarnation, passion, crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension.<sup>692</sup> In the doxology of the Twenty-Four Presbyters, we chant, “For great is the honor, of the incorporeal saints, the priests of Truth, the twenty-four presbyters. Because they are close to God, and near to His throne, they praise Him unceasingly, by day and by night. They sit upon twenty-four thrones, with crowns upon their heads, and with golden bowls in their hands, full of chosen incense. Which are the prayers, of the saints who lived on the earth, and they offer them, unto the true Lamb. And those who lived on the earth, their names will be revealed, they will ask the Lord for them, for they are close to God. Intercede on our behalf, the priests of the Truth, the twenty-four presbyters, that He may forgive us our sins.”

**1154. What do we know about the second rank, which includes the dominions, the lordships, and the powers?**

**First: The Dominions (or Authorities).** This name communicates the idea of elevation and freedom from anything that is earthly and from any inner inclination to being servile to others; or perfect freedom over every tyrannical violence, and the absence of any contemptible servility. As true sovereigns, they yearn for success and for God, the source of every sovereignty. They are constantly concerned that those who are below them might become more like God in their sovereignty.

**Second: The Lordships (or Virtues).** These have powerful capabilities in the likeness of God. They know no weakness or languor in their reception of the divine illumination that is granted to them. They are occasionally referred to as the radiant or the illuminated. This illumination is composed perfectly and wondrously like the virtues. They show no weakness or fragility in receiving the divine illumination granted to them. They ascend with perfect power towards likeness to God, ascending towards the Source of power and virtue. They yearn constantly that their own desire to delight in divine virtue might overflow into others.

**Third: The Powers.** These are equal to the dominions and lordships, and of the same divine order that allows them to receive the divine in a manner that cannot be opposed. Their divine order exercises exalted power prudently. They are considered to be warrior angels, upholding the world and humanity against the powers of darkness and evil.

**1155. What do we know about the third rank,<sup>693</sup> which includes the principalities, the archangels, and the angels?**

**First: The Principalities.** The essence of this rank is dignity, spirituality, and awe. They are turned towards the Lord of Lords and lead others to acquire a fitting ‘princely’ nature.

<sup>692</sup> See Fr. Tados Yacoub Malaty, *The Book of Revelation*, trans., Victoria Malaty and Ramzy Malaty (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1996) On Revelation Chapter 5: pp. 82ff.

<sup>693</sup> “The Celestial Hierarchy” in *Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works*, trans., C. Luibheid (Paulist Press, 1987) Chapter 9.

They are the angels who guard cities, nations, and rulers against attack from evil angels. The term “principality” means being like God by becoming “princes” with authority in the royal order befitting royal powers.

In the epistle of Jude, it says, “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). So, just as there are principalities among the good angels, there are also principalities among the evil powers who were not worthy of their status. Instead of leading those below them to be like God, they fell from their leadership because of their pride, and now lead others to evil, even though they are aware that they are being preserved in darkness until the Day of Judgement. The apostle Jude gives this evil example so that the faithful might not trust in the gifts, talents, or position granted to them. Thus, he alerts us to the risk of falling into pride that besets religious leaders, in his desire that the Lord preserve them from relying on themselves.

**Second: The Archangels.** These are considered to be rulers and leaders of the angels (Jude 9; 1 Thess. 4:16). Each archangel leads a host of angels according to invisible, transcendent principles. They are closely related to the principalities as well as the lower angels. There are said to be seven archangels who have the honor of standing before the throne of God in heaven. In the Book of Revelation, it is said of them: “From the seven Spirits who are before the throne” (Rev. 1:4) and that they are “seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God” (Rev. 4:5).

**St. Clement of Alexandria** and **St. Cyprian** believe that these are the seven archangels, as is evident from the words of the archangel Raphael that he himself is one of the seven archangels standing before the Lord (Tob. 12:15). We continually seek their intercession after that of St. Mary the Mother of God (as in the *Commemoration of Saints* in the Psalmodia); and especially, “the three great holy luminaries: Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael.”

**Third: The Angels.** These are the lowest of the heavenly ranks that have an angelic nature. They deal directly with our world. Every one of us has his own guardian angel, especially those who fear God, and children. Some think that faithful humans and those who walk by the Spirit will become — on the great day of the Lord — like a tenth rank, as though they had taken the place of Satan and his angels who fell from their ranks.

### **1156. What do we know about the archangel Michael?**

The western Church tends to talk about Michael, the great among the archangels; but in the eastern Church, he is seen more as the leader of the army of the Lord, which means that he leads all the hosts in war against the devil and evil. He is called “Michael,” which means, “who is like God?” because he loves humanity and is zealous for them. God grants him authority to fight the dragon on their behalf (Rev. 12:7). He has a special role as a messenger from God to protect His people in difficult situations (Tob. 12:6, 15; John 5:4; Rev. 12:7–9).

The Jews count him as the guardian angel of their nation, while Christians see him as the guardian angel of the Church. The Copts are accustomed to build a church in his name at the top of the highest building of each monastery, since he is the guardian angel of monasteries and monks.

### **1157. What do we know about the archangel Michael's war against the devil?**

According to **Victorinus of Pettau**, this is the beginning of the time of the “antichrist,” when the archangel Michael wages war upon the devil, overcomes him, and casts him down from heaven so that he can no longer accuse the faithful. As a result of this war, the devil falls from his place, spreads all his venom, and exerts all his energy to extract revenge in the limited left to him before he is cast into Gehenna forever. With this, the time of the antichrist begins, and the two witnesses come, who are Elijah and Enoch.

The Holy Bible thus portrays Michael as the commander of the angelic army, while Gabriel is portrayed as the commander of those who preach; the angelic messengers to humanity. Amidst his potency, capability, and rank in his war against the devil, Michael displays humility (Jude 9).

Michael is the greatest among the seven archangels. The archangel Gabriel refers to him as “Michael ... the great prince” (Dan. 12:1); and he himself says, “I am the commander of the army of the Lord” (Josh. 5:14), which means that he commands both angels and archangels. The Church’s liturgical texts describe him more than once as “the head of the heavenly angelic warriors of the Lord.” It is a great victory indeed to cast the devil down from heaven so that he cannot accuse us. Till his last moments, he shall not cease from his deceptions. He has been called:

- a. The covering cherub (Ezek. 28:14, 16).
- b. Lucifer (Bearer of Light) (Isa. 14:12).
- c. Satan (Zech. 3:1).
- d. The evil one (John 17:15; Matt. 13:19, 38).
- e. The enemy (Matt. 13:28).
- f. The devil (i.e., the deceiver).
- g. The ruler of this world (John 12:31, 16:11).
- h. The god of this age (2 Cor. 4:4).
- i. The prince of the power of the air (Eph. 2:2).
- j. Beelzebub, the lord of the flies (Matt. 12:24).
- k. Belial (2 Cor. 6:15).

- l. The serpent of old (2 Cor. 11:3, Rev. 12:9).
- m. The great dragon (Rev. 12:3, 7, 9).
- n. The accuser (Rev. 12:10).
- o. The deceiver (Rev. 12:9; 20:3).
- p. The murderer (John 8:44).
- q. The liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

When the enemy reaches the last moments before his end, St. John the beloved says, “Then I heard a loud voice, saying in heaven: Now salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of His Christ have come, for the accuser of our brethren, who accused them before our God day and night, has been cast down. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death. Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time” (Rev. 12:10–12).

These heavenly hosts expose the weakness of the devil, and his defeat is apparent from his fall from heaven. The heavenly hosts rejoice in the glorious day of judgement at the proclamation of humanity’s victory by the precious Blood. In their exultation and love for humanity, they call the Church that fights continuously in this world, their “brothers,” for they become like the angels of God.

### **1158. Were there other contentions between the archangel Michael, and the devil and his kingdom?**

It was Michael who supported the archangel Gabriel and aided him against the devil — ruler of the kingdom of Persia — when the latter stood against Gabriel and resisted him for twenty-one days to keep him from reaching Daniel the prophet. At the conclusion of his long fast and prayers over twenty-one days, Gabriel had come from heaven to give Daniel the good news that God would save his people. Having finally reached Daniel after his three full weeks of fasting and prayer, he said to him, “Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come because of your words. But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days; and behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left alone there with the kings of Persia. Now I have come to make you understand what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision refers to many days yet to come.” (Dan. 10:12–14).

And at the end of his message to Daniel, the archangel Gabriel said, “O man greatly beloved, fear not! Peace be to you; be strong, yes, be strong! ... Do you know why I have

come to you? And now I must return to fight with the prince of Persia ... But I will tell you what is noted in the Scripture of Truth. No one upholds me against these, except Michael your prince” (Dan. 10:19–21). In these divine words the power and authority of the archangel Michael is revealed.

**St. Basil the Great** calls us to fight and rejoice alongside the angels, saying, “Examine the actions of each day, compare them with those of the previous day and press on toward improvement. Advance in virtue, that you may become a companion of the angels. Spend your time in retirement, not for days nor months, but throughout many years, praising your Lord in song, night and day, in imitation of the Cherubim. If thus you begin and thus make an end, traveling the straight road for the short time of your probation, you will, by the grace of God, enter into paradise with the lamp of your soul brilliantly alight, to rejoice with Christ for ever and ever. Amen.”<sup>694</sup>

He also says, “What, then, is more blessed than to imitate on earth the choirs of angels; hastening at break of day to pray, to glorify the Creator with hymns and songs, and, when the sun is brightly shining and we turn to our tasks, to accompany them everywhere with prayer, seasoning the daily work with hymns, as food with salt? For, the inspirations of the sacred songs give rise to a joyousness that is without grief. Silence, then, is the beginning of purification in the soul ... When the mind is not engaged by external affairs, nor diffused through the senses over the whole world, it retires within itself. Then, it ascends spontaneously to the consideration of God ... Meditation on the divinely inspired Scriptures is also a most important means for the discovery of duty ... Accordingly, by a continual practice of that virtue in which he perceives himself deficient, each one finds, just as he would in some public apothecary shop, a suitable remedy for his infirmity.”<sup>695</sup>

“Now, being enslaved not to men, but to sin, you are called to liberty that He may free you from your captivity and make your rights equal to those of the angels. He shall raise you to be a child of God by adoption through grace; an heir to the treasures of Christ, so much so that you will say that time does not suffice for you to partake of all these gifts.”

### **1159. When do we celebrate the feast of the archangel Michael?**

The Coptic Church celebrates his feast on the twelfth of every Coptic month, especially in Hathor and Paone. The Eastern Orthodox Churches who follow the Byzantine rite celebrate the feast of the archangel Michael and the archangel Gabriel on the eighth of November; and the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the feast of the archangel Michael on the twenty-ninth of September, as does the Anglican Communion.

It was the custom of the Copts — especially in rural areas — to mark this celebration with liturgies and prayers, followed by banquets to feed the poor and the needy customarily

<sup>694</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On Renunciation of the World* XX (FOTC 9:31).

<sup>695</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 1–185* Letter 2 (FOTC 13:7–8).

consisting of fish, sweetened pastries, and a certain kind of bread baked with sugar or honey and oil, known in Arabic as *feteer al-malak* (the sweetbread of the Angel).

The date of the commemoration of the archangel Michael — the twelfth day of the Coptic month of Hathor — was, for the ancient Egyptians, the feast of the god Zuhul. When the Egyptians became Christians, Pope Alexander I (the 19<sup>th</sup> Patriarch of Alexandria, 312–328 A. D.), converted this celebration into a feast for the archangel Michael, having built a church in his honor in place of the old temple of Zuhul.

The other major feast day — the twelfth day of the Coptic month of Paone — coincides with the beginning of the flooding of the Nile River, which was one of the most important national feasts for the ancient Egyptians. Originally, the Egyptians celebrated the god of the Nile on this day, believing that by doing so, the god would be merciful to the Egyptians in their hot, dry season. They believed that the god would fly up to the source of the Nile and would spit out droplets of water from his mouth, which would then evaporate and turn into many clouds, so that rain would come down over the mountains, causing the Nile River to flood, and water to give fertility to the land and joy to the people, who would then exchange gifts as an expression of joy and gratitude for all the abundant goodness.

When the Egyptians became Christians, that national feast of the Nile became a feast for the archangel Michael, who is the archangel who stands before the divine throne in heaven, interceding on behalf of the people and raising their prayers to God, asking God for the rising of the waters, and for fertility to fill all the valley of the Nile.

### **1160. Why do some call the archangel Michael “the angel of the resurrection of the Lord Christ”?**

The Bible nowhere explicitly mentions the name of the angel who came down from heaven and rolled back the great stone from the door of the tomb. However, in some books of the Church we find the elaboration that this angel was in fact the archangel Michael. For example, in the Fraction for the Resurrection and the Holy Fifty Days, we find: “Michael the archangel descended from heaven and rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, and proclaimed the glad tidings to the women carrying the spices, saying, ‘Christ is risen from the dead.’” In the *Psali Adam* for Thomas Sunday, we sing: “Michael spoke to them [the women carrying the spices] and said in gladness: ‘He is not here’ (Mark 16:6).” And in an old veneration for the archangel we sing, “Hail to Michael, the archangel who announced the salvation of the Resurrection. For you have come down from heaven in great luminous glory, and you rolled back the stone from the door of the tomb, and you sat on it in great awe. You spoke to the women with joy, splendor, and spiritual purity, comforting them that Jesus of Nazareth has risen, and is not here.”



**1161. Why do some refer to the archangel Michael as “the angel of the general resurrection”?**

The archangel Michael is known as the angel of the general resurrection who will sound the trumpet to announce the second coming of Christ, when He comes to judge the living and the dead, who will rise again to be judged. St. Paul says, “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thess. 4:16). In an old veneration hymn for the archangel Michael, it says, “You are he who will sound the trumpet on the last day at the end, so that the dead may rise to be clothed in their bodies by God’s power. And then, each person will be judged according to his works before the throne of the Just Judge. We ask you O Archangel Michael to be with us on that day.”

In the Doxology of the archangel Michael, we sing: “Michael, the head of the heavenly, he is the first among the angelic ranks, serving before the Lord. God sends unto us His mercy and compassion through the supplications of Michael, the great Archangel. The harvest is perfected through the prayers of Michael for he is close to God, asking him on our behalf. All good honor and every perfect gift comes to us from on high from the Father of lights. Let us praise and glorify and worship the Holy Trinity, one in essence, who abides forever. Intercede on our behalf, O holy Archangel, Michael the head of the heavenly that He may forgive us our sins.”

**1162. What do we know about the archangel Gabriel?**

The word “Gabriel” means “the strength of God,” which indicates the power of God and the greatness of His great works with us. He is the angel who preaches good news. In his conversation with Zechariah the high priest, he speaks of himself, describing the honor of his mission and the glory of his role thus: “I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God” (Luke 1:19). This is very similar to the words of the archangel Raphael to Tobias: “I am Raphael, one of the seven holy angels who report the prayers of the saints and who enter before the glory of the Holy One” (Tob. 12:15 LXX).

**1163. What is the role of the archangel Gabriel, as it is described in the Book of Daniel?**

The angel came to Daniel to interpret for him the vision he saw by the River Ulai: “And I heard a man’s voice between the banks of the Ulai, who called and said: ‘Gabriel, make this man understand the vision’ (Dan. 8:15–16). Daniel the prophet sought the meaning of this vision, and found before him “one having the appearance of a man” — most likely the Word of God before His incarnation, since He has the authority to order Archangel Gabriel to interpret the vision for Daniel. “So he came near where I stood ... I was afraid and fell on my face, but he said to me: ‘Understand, son of man, that the vision refers to the time of the end.’ Now, as he was speaking with me, I was in a deep sleep with my face to the ground, but he touched me, and stood me upright; and he said: ‘Look. I am making known to you

what shall happen in the latter time of the indignation; for at the appointed time the end shall be” (Dan. 8:17–19).

There is another mention of the name of the archangel Gabriel in Dan. 9:20–23: “Now while I was speaking, praying ... the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the beginning, being caused to fly swiftly, reached me about the time of the evening offering. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said: ‘O Daniel, I have now come forth to give you skill to understand. At the beginning of your supplications the command went out, and I have come to tell you, for you are greatly beloved. Therefore, consider the matter, and understand the vision.’” The literal meaning of the Hebrew word “beloved” is “the man whom God desires,” that is, the place of God’s joy. God, who loves all humanity, rejoices greatly in those who enjoy a deep relationship with Him, and He takes pleasure in revealing His divine mysteries to them.

For the first time we hear that angels have wings and can fly. He appeared to Daniel in the appearance of a man, which is why he says, “the man Gabriel.” In this way, God assures humanity of His appreciation and affection for us; for He does not send angels merely to serve humans, but He even gives them our human form so we may easily have dealings with them. **St. Jerome** says, “It is said that ‘**he flew,**’ since he appeared in the form of a man.”<sup>696</sup>

Daniel studied the prophecies of Jeremiah the prophet and understood the timing of the return from exile; yet he was in need of a greater understanding, so that his heart might let go of hope for the return to *Canaan* and turn instead to the return to *heaven*, which would come about through the work of the Messiah. He prophesied to him of the coming of Christ the redeemer, the fulfilment of redemption and salvation, and the destruction of the temple and the holy places (Dan. 9:23, 27).

The angel served Daniel in an angelic manner: “Suddenly a hand touched me, which made me tremble on my knees and on the palms of my hands” (Dan. 10:10). It is apparent that Daniel saw this vision while bowed down to the ground on his knees and hands and relied on this heavenly aid to rise again. The hand that wrote on the wall and terrified King Belshazzar (Dan. 5:24–25) was the same hand that touched Daniel and strengthened him both to arise and to understand. Some consider this heavenly hand to be a type of the divine incarnation, since the Lord Christ works divinely with us and grants us understanding and wisdom as well as redemption and salvation.

**St. Jerome** says, “The angel appeared in the form of a man and laid his hand on Daniel the prophet who was kneeling on the ground. The angel bore this [human] form so that Daniel might not be terrified.”<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>696</sup> St. Jerome, PL 25:680A.

<sup>697</sup> St. Jerome, PL 25:697G.

The appearance of angels in human form reveals heaven's respect for humanity. They have no physical bodies, yet they are not loathe to appear in human form. Thus do they proclaim the heavenly beings' desire to enter into friendship with us.

**St. Jerome** comments on the expression "beloved" saying, "The term is apt, for every saint possesses a beauty of soul and is beloved of the Lord."<sup>698</sup>

Daniel abased himself in repentance before his God, through his personal relationship with God, whom he considered his own God, and hence was worthy of God sending him an angel, for "the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him" (Ps. 34:7).

Was the archangel Gabriel incapable of resisting the devil who incited the spirit of violence and hatred in Cambyses against the faithful? Or was he incapable of resisting the wicked king himself? Why did God send him the archangel Michael (Dan. 10:12–14)? I do not think that the words of the archangel Gabriel here lessen his status or his power in any way. Rather, they reveal the spirit of cooperation that exists even among heavenly beings. They also reveal God's care for His people; He sends more than one of His archangels for the sake of His people. Jonathan says, "Nothing restrains the Lord from saving by many or by few" (1 Sam. 14:6).

The archangel Gabriel saved Daniel the prophet from the lion's den and shut their mouths, so they would not hurt him: "Then Daniel said to the king: O king, live forever! My God sent His angel and shut the lions' mouth, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him; and also, O king, I have done no wrong before you" (Dan. 6:21–22).

In the tradition of the Apostolic Churches of the East and West, it is said that the archangel Gabriel was the one who took Habakkuk the prophet from the land of Israel and the borders of Nazareth to Daniel the prophet in the lions' den in the land of the Chaldeans (Dan. 12:33–39). It was he who brought the glad tidings to the Virgin Mary about the incarnation of God the Word from her (Luke 1:26–35). He was the angel who brought the glad tidings to the shepherds of the birth of the Lord Christ (Luke 2:8–14). He was the angel who instructed the Magi not to return to King Herod after they worshipped the newborn Christ and presented their gifts to Him. He accompanied Christ in His childhood, serving Him, and accompanied the holy family on their trip to Egypt and their journey back home to Israel. And he appeared to the Lord Christ in the garden of Gethsemane during His passion and said to Him, "Yours is the power" (Luke 22:43).

In the Jewish tradition — according the Targum, which is the Aramaic translation of the Old Testament along with its interpretation that was customarily read in Jewish synagogues at the time of the second temple and later — the archangel Gabriel was the man who led Joseph to his brothers, when he was sent by his father Jacob to see if all was well with them: "Now a certain man found him, and there he was, wandering in the field. And the man asked

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<sup>698</sup> St. Jerome, PL 25:697G.

him, saying, ‘What are you seeking?’ So he said, ‘I am seeking my brothers. Please tell me where they are feeding their flocks.’ And the man said, ‘They have departed from here, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’ So Joseph went after his brothers and found them in Dothan.” (Gen. 37:13–17). In this tradition, it is also the archangel Gabriel who helps the archangel Michael to bury the body of Moses and hide it from the children of Israel (Deut. 34:6). And he is the angel sent by the Lord to kill the one hundred and eighty-five thousand soldiers of the army of Sennacherib (2 Kings 19:35; Job 32:21; Isa. 37:36).

When Abraham, the father or the fathers, hosted the Lord by the terebinth trees of Mamre (Gen. 18:1–23; Heb. 13:2), the archangel Gabriel was one of the two angels accompanying Him, together with the archangel Michael. Later, these two angels went to Lot and rescued him and his family from the destruction that came upon Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:1–22).

#### **1164. What role did the archangel Gabriel play in the annunciation of the incarnation?**

**St. Jacob of Sarug** describes the Virgin St. Mary as a vivid example of spiritual knowledge through faith. She spoke with the archangel Gabriel, striving to understand the mystery of the divine incarnation; not merely for the sake of debate but in a spirit of submission, humility, and sincere love for God. Thus, she delighted the incarnation of the Word of God in her womb, while remaining a virgin forever. Therefore, it is fitting for us to abstain from dry debates and instead welcome God’s work within us in sincere faith, that Christ may dwell within us and grant our souls the gift of boundless spiritual virginity. **St. Jacob** says:

“That moment was full of wonder when Mary was standing,  
conversing in argument with Gabriel.

One humble daughter of poor folk and one angel  
met each other and spoke of a wonderful tale.

**A pure virgin and a fiery Watcher spoke with wonder:  
a discourse which reconciled dwellers of earth and heaven.**

One woman and the prince of all the hosts  
had made an agreement for the reconciliation of the whole world.

The two had sat between heavenly beings and earthly ones;  
they spoke, attended to and made peace for those who were wroth.

Maiden and Watcher met each other and conversed in argument on the matter  
until they abolished the conflict between the Lord and Adam.

That great strife which occurred amidst the trees<sup>699</sup>  
came up for discussion, and it all came to an end; there was peace.

An earthly being and a heavenly one spoke with love;  
the struggle between the two sides ceased, and they were at peace.”<sup>700</sup>

Archangel Gabriel was the angel who spoke to Philip the deacon (Acts 8:26–40). He was one of the two angels who appeared to the women at the Savior’s tomb in luminous garments.

The Church celebrates his feast on the thirteenth of Hathor, the twenty-second of Kiahk, the third of Paremhat, and the thirteenth of Paone. In the doxology of the archangel Gabriel, we sing: “Gabriel the Archangel was seen by Daniel, standing on his feet on the shore of the river. He stretched out his right hand to heaven and he swore to the High One who endures forever. Saying ‘From a time and times to half a time until the completion of the visions, I will show to you.’ Michael and Gabriel, Your great archangels, sing to You O King of glory proclaiming and saying: Holy God, heal those who are sick. Holy Mighty, those who slept, O Lord, repose them. Holy Immortal, bless Your inheritance. May Your mercy and Your peace be a fortress unto Your people. And when they say ‘Alleluia,’ the heavenly respond saying, ‘Holy Amen Alleluia. Glory be to our God.’ Intercede on our behalf, O holy archangels, Michael and Gabriel, that He may forgive us our sins.”

### 1165. What do we know about the archangel Raphael?

“Raphael” is a Hebrew name which means “the compassion of God.” He was Tobias’ guide throughout his journeys, and he healed his father’s eyes. The Church celebrates his feast on the third of Nesi (the little month), which is the commemoration of the consecration of a church named after him. This church was built by Pope Theophilus, the twenty-third Patriarch of Alexandria. For this reason, the archangel Raphael is considered the intercessor for the sick and the patron of hospitals, the guardian of sailors and travelers, the supporter of physicians and eye specialists, and of those who prepare medical prescriptions. He is also the intercessor of those who desire a happy marriage, who ask for his prayers and his help, that they may find prosperity, happiness, and have children.

**St. John Chrysostom** narrates his vision concerning the archangel Raphael in a sermon about him on his feast, at the church that was built by the emperor Arcadius in his name. He says, “It happened to me one day, when I John was celebrating my Eucharist at the sixth hour, that a great light rose up in the house wherein I was, and, behold, a young man with an exceedingly beautiful countenance came in to me. He was enveloped in great splendour, and he had a staff of gold, surmounted by a cross, in his right hand, and he called unto me three times, saying, ‘John, you reed of the Holy Spirit! John, you tongue that heals the souls which have been shattered by sin! John, you tongue of the speaker who is able to persuade God in

<sup>699</sup> The tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life

<sup>700</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *On the Mother of God* Homily 1 (PP 19:29).

the Seventh Heaven!’ And when I heard these words I was troubled, and I fell down at his feet that I might worship him. And he took hold of my hand, and raised me up, and said unto me, ‘Fear not. Do not [worship me], for I am your fellow servant, worship God.’ And I said unto him with fear and trembling, ‘Who are you, O my lord, who are enveloped in such great splendour? I have never seen any one like you.’ And he removed fear from me and he said unto me, ‘I am Raphael, one of the Seven Archangels. I am Raphael whom my Master joined to Philotheus, and I presented him and his father and his mother to the Christ Jesus. I am Raphael the archangel, and the Christ gave you into my hand from the time when you were a child. And moreover, from the time when you were born until this day, I have never left you for an hour, or for half an hour, or even for the twinkling of an eye. And I will never leave you until the day [comes] when I shall take you to the King, the Christ. He gave you into my hand when you were spotless. [I was with you] in the house of the learned man who taught you letters, and also when you made your passage by sea to Athens and Beirut, into which cities you entered. I walked with you and I prepared the path whereon you were to travel, and I prepared for you the instruction which was peculiarly suitable for your mind and heart, even as the husbandman prepares his seed beforehand, and digs his furrows in the water. And now, be strong and prevail. Fear not, O marvellous confessor, for I am not one to strike fear into souls; on the contrary, I am one who gives comfort unto souls, for I am called by my fellow angels, “The merciful angel.” Be strong, let your heart be bold, and fear not, for I am not associated with disturbance, but with peace.’”<sup>701</sup>

Archangel Raphael was the aid of many, including Tobias, St. Philotheos, Abba Jesse the martyr, St. Thomas the Anchorite, Prince Theodore of Shatb, the pious queen and the lover of God Euphemia, and many others.

In a doxology for the Archangel Raphael, we sing: “Every generation that was from Adam to this day find Raphael a fortress for mankind. Each one of the judges, the prophets and the just, and the righteous kings, were supported by him. He has guided our holy fathers the Apostles until they restored the world to the knowledge of the truth. He did not forsake any of the struggling martyrs of our Lord Jesus Christ until they wore the unfading crowns. The chosen ascetics, who were lost in the wilderness, Raphael surrounded them, until they completed their lives.”

### **1166. What do we know about the archangel Suriel?702**

“Suriel” in Hebrew means “God is my Rock.” According to the Coptic Synaxarium it means “the trumpet of God,” since he will sound the trumpet on the last day before God sends

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<sup>701</sup> “Encomium on the Archangel Raphael by Saint John Chrysostom (incomplete),” in Budge, E. A. Wallis. *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (Longman’s and Co., 1915): pp. 1039–1040, amended. *Editor’s Note: the authenticity of this text is doubtful.*

<sup>702</sup> See Nabil Elijah Fanous and Gamal George Antoun, *The Holy Angels (Arabic)*, 2014; the entry for “Archangel Suriel” at the website of St. Takla Heymanout, Ibrahimia, Alexandria; the Coptic Synaxarium entry for 27 Toba; and the Book of the Holy Psalmody.

his angels to sound their trumpets, making a great sound, before His chosen people gather from the four winds. The Church celebrates his feast on the twenty-seventh of Tobe and calls him the trumpeter of the melody of joy. The Church looks to him as the one who brings more joy to hearts than anything in this vain world.

- a. It was said of him that he accompanied Ezra the scribe, supported him, and revealed hidden mysteries to him. The Synaxarium says that he announced the good news of salvation to Adam and delivered Joseph from the hands of the wife of his master, Potiphar.
- b. It was said of him that he supported the martyrs and saints in their spiritual warfare and helped them to be steadfast in their faith.
- c. The apocryphal book of 2 Esdras (chs. 2–4, NRSV) says that Ezra saw a great multitude on the Temple Mount, praising God; and then he saw a young man who was taller than all. The archangel Suriel explained to him that this is the Son of God (2 Esdras 2:42–47 NRSV).
- d. Ezra complained to the angel about his tribulations, but the angel answered that these are due the evil that dwells in the hearts of Adam and his offspring. When Ezra then complained to him that “our years are few and evil” (2 Esdras 4:33 NRSV) and wanted to know when the world would come to an end, the angel answered, “Do not be in a greater hurry than the Most High ... When the number of those like yourselves is completed” (2 Esdras 4:34, 36 NRSV). He told him that the archangel Ananiel is the one who brings peace to the hearts of the martyrs beneath the altar and tells them to them to rest a little while longer, until the number of their fellow martyrs is completed (Rev. 6:11). And he revealed to him the days of tribulation in the last times and impressed upon him how important it is for the people of God to go through the narrow gate.
- e. The angel explained to him that the wicked suffer affliction for seven reasons (2 Esdras 7:80–87 NRSV): they have scorned the law of the Most High; they reject repentance; they see the reward of the saints; they are aware of the torment laid up for them; they see the lives of others being guarded by angels in peace; they see how some of them will cross over into torments; and they shall wither with fear at the prospect of seeing God. On the other hand, the righteous will enjoy seven sources of joy (2 Esdras 7:88–98 NRSV): they strive for victory over sin; they see the wicked wandering in perplexity and the punishment that awaits them; God bears witness of their goodness; the security they now enjoy, guarded by angels, and the glory awaiting them in the last days; they have escaped corruption and will inherit immortality; they know that their faces will shine like the sun and like the light of the stars; and they shall be glad without fear to see the face of God.

In the doxology of the archangel Suriel, we sing, “Let us worship the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and honor Suriel, the fourth in archangels. Good is the joy of Suriel, which we ascribe to him in the churches, more than the joy of a bridegroom, of this passing world. You know O my beloved, that the joy of this world passes, but the joy of Suriel, endures forever. Intercede on our behalf, O holy archangel, Suriel the trumpeter, that He may forgive us our sins.”

**1167. Who are the remainder of the seven archangels?**

They are the archangels Sedakiel, Sarathiel, and Ananiel. In the doxology for all the heavenly beings, we sing, “Seven archangels, praising as they stand, before the Pantocrator, serving the hidden Mystery. Michael is the first, Gabriel is the second, Raphael is the third, a symbol of the Trinity; Suriel, Sedakiel, Sarathiel, and Ananiel; the great and holy luminaries, entreating Him for the creation. The cherubim and the seraphim, the thrones, dominions, and powers; the four incorporeal creatures, carrying the throne of God; the twenty-four presbyters, in the church of the first-born, praising Him without ceasing, proclaiming and saying: Holy God, heal the sick; Holy Mighty O Lord repose those who are asleep. Holy Immortal, bless your inheritance, may Your mercy and peace be a fortress to Your people. Holy, Holy, Holy, O Lord of hosts, heaven and earth are full of Your glory and honor. And when they say Alleluia, the heavenly respond saying: Holy. Amen. Alleluia. Glory be to our God. Intercede on our behalf, O angelic armies and heavenly orders, that He may forgive us our sins.”





## 4

# The Devil Has No Authority Over Us<sup>703</sup>

### 1168. Who are the evil angels?

The picture of the devil that we find in many of the books of the Old Testament is that he is an oppressor who opposes the righteous. The New Testament — especially the Book of Revelation — speaks of the devil and his character, thoughts, his enmity with humanity, and his desire to destroy us.

God created the devil and his angels with the rest of the angels, but through pride, the devil fell from his rank (Isa. 14:12–14). He desired to sit on the throne of God. His angels followed him and fell with him from heaven.

The devil took the form of a serpent in order to deceive Eve (Gen. 3:1–6). The Book of Wisdom tells us, “but through the devil’s envy death entered the world” (Wisd. of Sol. 2:24). Our Savior called him “the great dragon, the serpent of the old, Satan and the devil who deceives the whole world” (Rev. 12:9, 20:2). He afflicted Adam and Eve with [spiritual] blindness, so they chose sin instead of the light of divine truth. They lost their awareness of God’s will and His plan of salvation. Our Lord emphatically told us that Satan was a murderer from the beginning and does not abide in the truth because he is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44).

### 1169. What was the state of the devil before his fall?

The devil was called Lucifer (i.e., **morning star**), but he lost the light and became the ruler of the kingdom of darkness. The prophet Isaiah says: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds.’” (Isa. 14:12–14). The devil was a brilliant star among the heavenly beings; the bright “morning star.” He not only enjoyed the light himself, but also enjoyed the divine gift of shining that light upon others, like the dawning of light in the morning. But he arrogantly sought to exalt himself above God his Creator and the Source of his light.

The scholar **Origen** speaks of the devil as having been created good, but then sinning by his own will, saying: “Those who say that the devil is not a creation of God are in error. Devils as such are not created by God; but the being itself (as a creature) is the creation of

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<sup>703</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Devil and Our Victory over Him* (2005); and *Does the Devil Have Authority Over You?* (1969 — the title of the original article was *A Response to Those Who Say that the Devil Governs Human Affairs*).

God. Likewise, we say that the murderer is not created as such by God; but as a human being, he is created by God.”<sup>704</sup>

### 1170. Is the devil a real entity?

The Holy Bible affirms the fact of the devil’s existence as a being with certain attributes, will, and work. For example:

- a. In the Book of Job, God enters into a dialogue with the devil, who is one of the angelic beings; and the devil reveals that he is a being who roams the earth. He makes accusations against the righteous Job.
- b. The devil tempted the Lord Christ in the wilderness, had a conversation with Him, and then departed from Him until an opportune time (Luke 4:1–13).
- c. The archangel Michael contended with him (Rev. 12:7–9 and Jude 9).
- d. The devil wanted to sift the disciples of the Lord like grains of wheat (Luke 22:31).
- e. The devil caused some of the faithful to be cast into prison (Rev. 2:10).
- f. The devil has devices of which we are not ignorant (2 Cor. 2:11). We must beware of his craftiness (2 Cor 11:3) and knowledge (Rev. 12:12). He has a will (2 Tim. 2:26) and emotions of pride (1 Tim. 3:6) and anger (Rev. 12:12).

All this implies that the devil is a real being and not merely a figment of human imagination.

### 1171. Is the world filled with angels and demons?

The enemy of goodness, the devil — wanting to take control of all humanity and become the ruler of this world — does not cease from roaming the earth together with his angels, casting their nets and traps for humans, exposing their sins to God and accusing them. This is what we learn from the Book of Job. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “And the Lord said to Satan, “From where do you come?” So, Satan answered the Lord and said, “From going to and fro on the earth and from walking back and forth on it.” (Job 1:7). What do we understand from that? The earth is full of devils and angels ... This means that Satan is with the angels in the world. For just as deceitful people are mingled with the righteous, so are angels and devils also.”<sup>705</sup>

<sup>704</sup> Origen, *In Job*. Tome 2. C7.

<sup>705</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Commentary on Job 1.

**1172. What is the sin of the angels?**

The reason for the fall of the angels was pride (Isa. 14:12–14). This is the same sin into which Adam and Eve fell by the guile of the devil (Gen. 3:2–14).

**1173. Where do evil angels dwell?**

The abode of fallen angels is Hades, sometimes called “the fetters of darkness.” But until the judgement day comes, they enjoy a degree of freedom and are allowed to wage war on humanity (2 Cor. 2:11; 1 John 3:12).

The apostle Paul says, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12). And the apostle Peter says, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). It was said of Judas’ betrayal: “the devil having already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Him” (John 13:2). Hence the words: “For this purpose, the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8).

**1174. Were evil angels created with a different nature to that of the good angels?**

God created all heavenly beings as good; indeed, all His creations of any kind are good in their original nature. However, the wicked angels fell because they misused the gift of free will. They fell by haughtily clinging to their own personal will. The apostle Judas says of them: “And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day” (Jude 6). On the other hand, the good angels continue in goodness because they chose humility and cooperation with the grace of God. The evil angels, as they persist in their wickedness, become ever more deeply evil, which causes them to be envious of humanity and despise us, and seek to oppose us by all means possible. Their great powers, instead of being used to glorify God, are instead turned to deceiving and contending against humanity; luring humanity to share in their blasphemies, disobedience, and defiance against God. The devil himself became as father and teacher to all who submit to him, urging them also to deceive in turn their own brothers and sisters.

**1175. Why are evil angels called “devils,” or slanderers and deceivers?**

They are so called because they continually set snares to deceive humans and provoke in them evil desires. As the Lord Christ said to the unbelieving Jews: “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father, you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44).

**1176. Did the Lord Christ mention the devil and his angels?**

In very few instances, He mentioned the devil and his angels to warn us of their plots and deceptions. In stubbornness and haughtiness, the devil wages war upon the divine light.

**1177. How can we escape the snares of the devil?**

The psalmist saw himself as a bird without strength or power, incapable of escaping from the snare of the fowlers; namely the devil and his angels. But the Almighty helped him, broke the snare, and set him free. The psalmist sang, saying, “Our soul has escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowlers; the snare is broken and we have escaped. Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth” (Ps. 124:7–8).

**St. Jerome** says, “What snare is this that has been broken? ‘The Lord,’ says the Apostle, ‘will speedily crush Satan under our feet’ (Rom. 16:20); ‘that you may recover your-selves from the snare of the devil’ (2 Tim. 2:26). You see, then, that the devil is the hunter, eager to lure our souls unto perdition. The devil is master of many snares, deceptions of all kinds. Avarice is one of his pitfalls, detraction is his noose, fornication is his bait. ‘And from the destroying word’ (cf. Ps. 90:3). As long as we are in the state of grace, our soul is at peace; but once we begin to play with sin, then our soul is in trouble and is like a boat tossed about by the waves.”<sup>706</sup>

**1178. Who leads us in our battle against the devil?**

The apostle Paul instructs his disciple Timothy to be strong in his striving, not by human zeal, but by the grace granted to him. He writes to him: “You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). For the Christian in his spiritual striving fights against the devil and sin, under the command of the Lord of glory Himself who recruited him, and who is the “captain (or commander) of our salvation” (cf. Heb. 2:10). He is the commander who defeated the devil on the cross and continues now to conquer him through us. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “The devil shoots darts at me, but I have a sword; he is an archer, but I am a heavy-armed soldier ... the archer does not dare to draw near; he shoots his darts from afar.”<sup>707</sup>

**1179. What do these words mean: “Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air” (1 Cor. 9:26)?**

It is common among boxers that, when they first enter the ring before the start of the fight, they throw punches into thin air to warm themselves up, and perhaps to impress the crowds. This was known as *skiāmakhīā*, literally, *fighting against a shadow*, a false fight or

<sup>706</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 20 (FOTC 48:157).

<sup>707</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 3.11 (ACW 31:59–60).

fighting the air. However, when Christ entered the contest against the real enemy, He did not fight the air, but completely obtained His objective in our name and on our behalf. And He gave us His Holy Spirit that we might fight with conviction and powerfully strike the enemy who has been utterly shattered by the rain of blows of the Savior. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “‘So fight I, as not beating the air.’ This he says, again intimating that he acted not at random nor in vain. For I have one at whom I may strike, i.e., the devil. But you do not strike him, but simply throw away your strength.”<sup>708</sup>

### **1180. Who is stronger: the believer or the devil?**

**St. Macarius** endured much in his war against the devil and his forces, and he shares his practical experience with us. He realized that the soul that is supported by her heavenly Bridegroom and led by His Holy Spirit has the power to shatter the devil, demolish his fortresses, and ruin all his plans. In his homilies, he helps us to understand this, pointing out that if the devil were stronger than the human soul, the just God would not blame us when we are defeated.

**St. Macarius** says, “If you say that the opposing power is too strong, and that evil has complete sovereignty over man, you make God unrighteous when He condemns mankind for submitting to Satan, because Satan is so strong, and wields a power which compels submission. ‘You make Satan greater and stronger than the soul, and then command me, “Do not submit.” It is as though a young man should wrestle with a little child, and the child, when he is worsted, is condemned for getting worsted. This is a great injustice!”<sup>709</sup>

### **1181. What do these words mean: “Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens?” (Job 41:5)?**

At times, the Holy Bible depicts the devil as a terrible dragon, a roaring lion, or an aggressive crocodile, etc.; but at other times, as little fox lacking strength. If a person confronts the enemy of good using his own capabilities, he is be terrified before this violent enemy. But if he hides in the grace of God he sees the reality of the devil’s insignificance and his impotence to harm him. A bird that is domesticated is suitable for children to play with for amusement and entertainment, but not so with Leviathan (a monster). Sometimes, birds are caught and caged, and little girls can safely stand close to them and enjoy watching them. In some developing countries, parents tie birds to a string like a leash for their children’s entertainment.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “Then there are all the fearful and awful things that the Word narrates about him in the book of Job: his ribs are of bronze and his limbs of cast iron (cf.

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<sup>708</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 23.2 (NPNF I/12:132) amended.

<sup>709</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Sermon 3.6: p. 19, amended.

Job 40:18), and his entrails are powdered stone (cf. Job 41:7)—and all the statements of this sort by whose means the scriptural text sketches that fear some nature. Such he is, then, and so great, the commanding general of the legions of demons. But how is this one named by the true and only Power? He is a **little fox!** And all those who are about him, the army that is under his orders, all are disparagingly named in the same way by the one who urges the hunters to chase them down.”<sup>710</sup>

### 1182. How did the Lord Christ subjugate the devil?

- a. **Through the incarnation, He crushed the throne of the devil. St. Ambrose** says, “For holy Job prophesied of the coming of the Lord of Whom he said in truth that He would vanquish the great Leviathan (Job 41:8) and it was done. For that dread Leviathan that is, the devil, He smote, and struck down, and laid low in the last times by the adorable Passion of His own Body (Isa. 27:1).”<sup>711</sup>
- b. **Through the incarnation, He crushed the heads of the dragon. St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says: “Since, therefore, it was necessary to break the heads of the dragon in pieces (Ps. 74:14), He went down and bound the strong one in the waters, that we might receive power to tread upon serpents and scorpions (Luke 10:19). The beast was great and terrible. No fishing-vessel was able to carry one scale of his tail (Job 40:26): destruction ran before him (Job 41:13), ravaging all that met him. The Life encountered him, that the mouth of Death might henceforth be stopped, and all we that are saved might say, O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? (1 Cor. 15:55) The sting of death is drawn by Baptism.”<sup>712</sup>
- c. **Through the incarnation, we were liberated from the slavery of the devil. St. Dorotheos of Gaza** says: “Having become man, then, for our sakes, God freed man from the Enemy’s tyranny. He took away his power, broke his strength, took us out of his hand, and freed us from slavery to him—unless we spontaneously choose to obey him by sinning. For the Lord gave us power, as he told us, to trample on serpents and scorpions and all the power of the enemy (Luke 10:19).”<sup>713</sup>
- d. **Through the incarnation, He defeated the devil and condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3).** When the devil saw Jesus the Man, he coveted Him. But instead of snaring Him in the net of sin, he was shocked and terrified to discover that He lovingly bore the sins of all humanity. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “In the past, the devil

<sup>710</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) Homily 5: p. 177–179.

<sup>711</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Exposition of the Christian Faith* 5.2.30 (NPNF II/10:288).

<sup>712</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 3.11 (NPNF II/7:17).

<sup>713</sup> St. Dorotheos of Gaza, *Discourses and Sayings*, trans., Eric P. Wheeler (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1977) Discourse 1: p. 79.

destroyed Adam through a virgin; but now, the Lord Christ has defeated the devil through the Virgin.”

- e. **Christ grants victory. St. Jerome** sees the vision of the prophet Zechariah (Zech. 3:1–5) as a type of the Lord Christ. In the vision, Joshua (a type of Jesus) is clothed with filthy garments and Satan stands at His right-hand. In His love, Jesus stands in the place of Adam and his descendants, and when sin is taken away, a clean turban is placed on his head — this is our new condition in Christ Jesus our Savior.

Our secret weapon is the presence of the Lord Christ within us, for it is He who defeated the devil, and continues to defeat him through us. The Lord Christ Himself is our weapon, our victory, and our conquering over the devil and his army. The scholar **Origen** speaks of this. **St. Ephrem the Syrian** likens the devil to a wolf attacking the Lamb, Jesus, and devouring Him; but when death swallows Christ, it cannot contain Him; for He explodes it from within and liberates all those whom death had trapped within. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** likens the devil to a voracious fish that swallows the bait but is caught by the hook.<sup>714</sup> And **Gregory the Great** likens him to a bird attracted to the grain and thus snared in the net.<sup>715</sup>

- f. **Angels will receive us as victors in the Lord.** Commenting on the temptation, it says, “Then the devil left Him, and behold angels came and ministered to Him” (Matt. 4:11). **St. John Chrysostom** says, “After your victories, which are copied from His, angels will receive you also, applauding you and waiting on you as guards in all things.”<sup>716</sup>
- g. **Through the Lord, images were turned from the worship of the devil to honoring the Incarnate.** Images played a significant role in the worship of idols, drawing the hearts of many to the worship of the devil and other creatures. But now the Word has become flesh and dwelt among us (cf. John 1:14), sanctifying many as members of His body. Thus, icons became reminder of Him, and of the work of His grace in the lives of His saints who strive in the spirit of true love.
- h. **The fire of the Spirit burns devils.** After His ascension, Christ granted the Church the Holy Spirit of God who descended on the day of Pentecost in the form of fiery tongues. The fiery Spirit bestows upon the Church that which properly belongs to Christ Himself: victory over the devil. And He grants those who labor in the Church the gift of service by the power of that fiery Spirit; to rescue humanity from the kingdom of the devil’s compulsion and restore us to the kingdom of the Holy God.

**St Jerome** says, “If God is fire, He is fire in order to drive out the cold of the devil ... let us pray the Lord that any hardness in us may soften, that our sins be purged,

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<sup>714</sup> J. Tixeront, *History of Dogmas: Volume II* (Christian Classics, 1984): p. 155.

<sup>715</sup> Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job in Three Volumes* 33.31 (LFHCC 31:586).

<sup>716</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 13.5 (NPNF I/10:80) amended.



that we may become as fire, so the chill of the devil—whatever there is of it in our hearts—may be expelled so that we may grow warm with the Holy Spirit.”<sup>717</sup>

**St Macarius the Great** says, “As sticks thrown into the fire cannot resist the power of the fire, but are forthwith burned up, so the devils desiring to fight with a man to whom the Spirit has been vouchsafed are burned and consumed by the divine power of the fire, if only the man is at all times cleaving to the Lord, and keeping his trust and his hope towards Him. And even if the devils are strong as strong mountains, they are burned by prayer, like wax by fire.”<sup>718</sup>

**St. Anthony the Great** says, “I believe that those who have entered with all their heart, and have prepared themselves to endure all the trials of the enemy [the devil] until they prevail, are first called by the Spirit, who alleviates everything for them so that the work of repentance becomes sweet for them.”<sup>719</sup>

- i. **Victory over the devil is attained through faith.** The believer enters into a hidden war with a hidden enemy who never rests. Placing our faith in the One who dwells in heaven, the Lover of humanity, the Savior of the world with His precious Blood, we face the enemy with the fear of the Lord who grants us divine power and glorious joy. Standing fast with a powerful spirit against the devil, the apostle John says, “For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith” (1 John 5:4).

One may ask, how can anyone overcome the love of the world, out which the devil strives to create a kingdom and an army against the Church, using all his temptations and tribulations? Only through our faith in our Lord Jesus, who defeated the devil, and who continues to defeat him through His work in us, and shall have the victory. So, if we hide ourselves in Him, the way becomes easy, the heavy burden becomes light (cf. Matt. 11:28–30), worldly temptations become as nothing to us, and the tribulations of the world become a cause of joy to us (cf. John 16:33).

**Abba Macarius** says, “Indeed it is impossible for anyone who firmly believes, who labours with devotion, to fall into the impurity of the passions and be led astray by the demons.”<sup>720</sup>

- j. **Victory over the devil is attained through prayer and praise.** Nothing supports us in our war against the devil and his angels more than prayer, praise, and thanksgiving to God; for it is He who grants us victory in spiritual warfare. We should never cease

<sup>717</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 57 (FOTC 48:414–415).

<sup>718</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) Sermon 43.3: p. 270.

<sup>719</sup> St. Anthony the Great, *The Letters of St. Antony*, trans., Samuel Rubenson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995) Letter 1.18–19: p. 198.

<sup>720</sup> Macarius the Great, 20 in Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Desert Christian: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. trans., Benedicta Ward (MacMillan, 1975): p. 131.

from praying for our victory, and for the victory of our brothers and sisters; for through prayer and love, God gives them His help and grace.

“It was said of Abba Theodore [of Pherme] that when he settled down at Scetis, a demon came to him wanting to enter his cell, but he bound him to the outside of his cell. Once more another demon tried to enter, and he bound him too. A third demon came as well, and finding the other two bound, said to them, ‘Why are you standing outside like this?’ They said to him, ‘He is sitting inside, and will not let us enter.’ So the demon tried to enter by force. The old man bound him too. Fearing the prayers of the old man, they begged him, saying, ‘Let us go,’ and the old man said to them, ‘Go away.’ Then they went off covered with confusion.”<sup>721</sup>

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Praying the psalms, the Lord’s prayer to our heavenly Father, and the recitation of spontaneous prayers asking for mercy, aid, and salvation — these three are like three arrows that pierce devils and kill them.”<sup>722</sup>

**St. Arsenius** says, “Do not cease from prayer lest the demons find a place to sow weeds in your field (Matt. 13:25). Do not pity your body and let it sleep, but rouse it for praise. If you do not know how to praise, then thank God and say: ‘Glory be to You O Lord.’ Repeat these words many times; if you are able, repeat a thousand times, ‘Glory be to You O Lord!’ and the Lord will send His angel to help you cast away the demons. And do not fear them (Isa. 8:12), for He has assigned to you a guardian angel, as the Bible says: “The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them” (Ps. 34:7). In another place it says, ‘For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways’ (Ps. 91:11). Do not put your hope in the angels alone, saying, ‘they guard me.’ Rather, do not cease from prayer for it their responsibility to record your righteousness and to offer it to God. Guard yourself against laziness, for it makes the body heavy and keeps it from prayer. Strive in prayer and fasting, for **nothing makes the demons flee like prayer** (Mark 9:29). If they hinder you from sleeping at night, or torment and disturb you, then rise and pray that you may drive them away like dust (Ps. 37:20), and you will find rest. Do not say that the hour of prayer has not yet come. Do not cease from prayer at all times, because prayer is an arrow that expels demons. Even if Satan appears like a morning star before your eyes, be certain that the one who appeared is not the Lord, but Satan, trying to distract your attention with wonders.”

“If you pray, do not hurry, but contemplate on the One before whom you stand. Walk quietly and increase your prayer, for prayer is like an arrow that drives away demons,

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<sup>721</sup> Theodore of Pherme, 27 in Benedicta Ward, ed., *The Desert Christian: The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. trans., Benedicta Ward (MacMillan, 1975): p. 78.

<sup>722</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, Part 1, Homily 5.

who will wail and flee. If you want to visit someone, pray to God saying, ‘For this purpose, O Lord, I go out of my cell.’”

### 1183. How does our Christ recompense us for the losses we have suffered?

How often our Fathers directed our attention to the greatness of the blessings we enjoy in the midst of our war with the devil and his angels.

**First: We enjoy the heavens opened before us.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “You lost paradise; but God gave you heaven, to show you His compassion and His power over the devil. He shows that — even if the devil plots tens of thousands of plans against the human race — it will not benefit him, so long as God guides us always to a greater honor. You lost paradise (the Garden of Eden); and God opened heaven to you. You fell under condemnation, in weariness until now; and you were honored with eternal life. God commanded the earth to bring forth thorns and thistles; but the dust of the Spirit brings forth fruits for you. Do you not see that you profit far more than you lost?!”<sup>723</sup>

**Second: He exposes the foolishness of the devil in his attempts against us.** **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Such are the devil’s wiles that he not only drives us away from the blessings we have, but he also tries to drive us onto a more precipitous cliff. But God in His love did not fail to regard mankind. **He showed the devil how foolish were his attempts;** He showed man the great care He manifested in his regard, for through death He gave man everlasting life. The devil drove man from Paradise; God led him to heaven. The profit is greater than the loss.”<sup>724</sup>

**Third: He reveals to us the depths of God’s love for us.** According to the Liturgy of **St. Gregory the Theologian** “You, O Master have turned punishment for me into salvation. As a good shepherd, You have sought after those who have gone astray. As a good father, You have labored with me, I who had fallen. You gave me all the remedies that lead to life.” Jesus died and rose from the dead to raise us with him and to imbue the death of the flesh with the longing to fly free to paradise.

**Fourth: He makes the profit greater than the loss.** In our war against the devil, our crucified Christ raised our nature to the divine throne. Therefore, St. Paul the apostle cries, “He raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Jesus Christ; that in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6–7).

<sup>723</sup> St. John Chrysostom, Sermon in Gen. 7, PG 5:614C–D.

<sup>724</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 2.7 (ACW 31:45–46).

### **1184. Why did God not expel the devil from the world?**

Some might ask, if the devil cannot defeat us through strength, but only through cunning and deceit, would it not have been better for him to have been removed and dealt with far from our world? Job was able to defeat the power of the devil, but Adam was defeated and cast out. If the devil himself had been cast out first, wouldn't Adam have avoided being deceived and cast out?

**St John Chrysostom** answers this question in a number of ways:

**First:** He says that **those who overcome the devil deserve greater honor by far than those who are defeated**, even if those who are defeated are many, but those who are victorious few; for it is written, “one godly child is better than a thousand” (Sir. 16:3).

**Second:** Had the devil been banished from the world, **the victorious would have no honor**. Without the devil, the lazy and the wanton would fare no worse than those who are alert (other than suffering their laziness and wantonness itself). The devil's success in his attempts against Adam, and Adam's gullibility in believing his deception should not be understood as a victory for the devil arising from his power or nature, but as a defeat of the human arising from his laziness and negligence.

**Third: Should we blame the beautiful creation** just because some stumble because of it; despite it being a sign of God's love, wisdom, and power? Should we also, then, cut off our body members if we think them to be a cause of our perdition, because we are not cautious? But this is not because of the nature of our body members, but because of our laxity. God granted us eyes to see His creation, for which we ought to glorify the Lord. But when we misuse them, they become the tools of adultery. He gave us a tongue so that we might be well instructed and praise the Creator. But if we do not tend our souls, it becomes the instrument of blasphemy. We received hands to be lifted up in prayer. But when we are not vigilant, we find them working greed and avarice. And He granted us feet to walk in goodness. But through our neglect, they lead us to evil works.

**Fourth: Even the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing.** Assuredly, there is nothing that leads us to salvation more than the cross. Yet, “the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). And he also says, “We preach Christ crucified; to the Jews: a stumbling block and to the Greeks: foolishness” (1 Cor. 1:23).

**Fifth: For many, Christ is a stumbling block.** The coming of the Blessed One Himself came to be the cause of judgment for many: “Jesus said: ‘For judgment I have come into this world that those who do not see may see, and those who see may be made blind’” (John 9:39). The weak — those who persist in committing sin — are harmed by everything; while the strong benefit from everything.

**Sixth: God sets limits upon the devil that he cannot overstep**, to protect us from being swallowed up by him when we are unprepared. Therefore, we ought not fear the devil; even though he is a spirit, an incorporeal being. Given these limits, nothing could be weaker than he who comes in this manner, even if he is without a body; and nothing could be stronger than the one who is brave, even if he is mortal and in the flesh.

**Seventh: Without absolving the devil of his guilt**, I caution you against laziness. The devil's strategy is to take the blame for our sins. By doing so, he can plunge us into all kinds of sin and shift the responsibility for these falls onto him. Thus, we fall into a false sense of powerlessness against sin. But in doing this, we only become more blameworthy and exclude ourselves from the possibility of forgiveness; for in blaming the devil we give ourselves an excuse not to repent.

## Book 6

# **Christian Concepts *and* Everyday Life**

1. Christian Virtues
2. The Virtue of Discernment and Illumination
3. The Virtue of Obedience
4. The Virtue of Chastity and Purity
5. Vices or Evils
6. Christian Faith and Human Culture
7. The Relationship between Church and State
8. Christian Faith and Military Service
9. Christian Faith and Social and Familial Relationships
10. Social Cohesion
11. Christian Faith and Social Class
12. Christian Faith and Liberty
13. Wealth and the Wealthy in the Christian Faith
14. Science and Faith



# 1

## Christian Virtues

### 1185. What is the connection between virtues and life in Christ?

All of us, regardless of how much evil resides in us, find within ourselves a yearning to be virtuous in character. Philosophers and men of education have discussed the nature of virtue since ancient times. Many kings, governors, and rulers took care to entrust their children to the hands of philosophers who could train them to lead a virtuous life appropriate to their status.

The apostle Paul boasted that concerning the law, he was “a Pharisee ... concerning the righteousness which is in the law, blameless” (Phil. 3:5–6). When he met the Lord Christ, he realized that while the Law reveals to us the sins we commit (Rom. 3:20), it cannot remedy them (Gal. 2:16). Thus, he urges us to encounter the Lord Christ (Rom. 10:4) who alone is able to grant us union with Him and bestow upon us His righteousness. Therefore, when the apostle Paul talks about the “life in Christ” (Rom. 8:2), he means enjoying Christ’s righteousness or partaking of His characteristics, so that we may become as virtuous as is possible for us. These virtues touch every aspect of our lives: personal life; family life; work; social life; etc. It is difficult to restrict a virtue to just one particular aspect of life in isolation from other aspects of life, because the life in Christ is a unified life that impacts all aspects of life. The virtuous life is like an expensive gem with many facets.

### 1186. What is St. Paul’s understanding of Christian virtues?

- a. The apostle Paul does not break down the Christian virtues into specific behaviors. Instead, he provides us with a brief and simple list of the works of the Holy Spirit in our inner lives to mould our behavior in every area of our lives. He says, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23).
- b. The apostle offers this list of the fruits of the Spirit in order for them to be a kind of constitution for the whole life of the believer. He left it to the people of God — especially the Fathers of the Church — to work out how to practice these virtues in more detail; not merely as a code of ethics to be followed, but rather as the fruit of the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer as a child of God, a member of the body of Christ, and the temple of God in which the Spirit of God dwells.

### 1187. What are the most important virtues that characterize the Christian person?

1. **Love:** for God, for one’s neighbor, and even for one’s enemies.



**St. John Chrysostom** says, “this virtue especially makes man God-like. Notice how many other virtues are inferior to this, which are man-centered—the fight with concupiscence, the war on gluttony, the campaign against avarice, the battle against anger. Charity, on the other hand, is something man shares with God. That is why Christ said: *Pray for those who calumniate you, that you may be like your Father in heaven* (Matt. 5:44–45). Paul knew that charity was the crowning virtue and wished to cultivate it with the greatest care.”<sup>725</sup> **St. Augustine** says, “For he has no fruit, who has not Christ ... Do not wonder at what follows, when charity leads the way.”<sup>726</sup>

**2. Joy:** although both St. Paul the Apostle and St. John Chrysostom are often painted with stern and unsmiling facial expressions, in reality, both of them exhibited the depth and wonder of joy in their lives as well as in their writings. We can say that of their views of God and of the Holy Bible, the Church, worship, social issues, and even repentance, etc., that joy radiates from them, as it does also from their lives and in their call to all to the heavenly and godly life. They are like a dynamo that generates joy in the Lord in everyone they meet or address.

The Church is, in essence, the bride rejoicing in her heavenly Bridegroom. In Him she dwells in the highest, while she is still on earth in the body. By true membership in the Church a person is elevated, so that even his earthly body becomes heavenly, awaiting with joy the partaking of eternal glory. **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Amazing again, where has He raised the Church? as though he were lifting it up by some engine, he raised it up to a vast height, and set it on yonder throne; for where the Head is, there is the body also.”<sup>727</sup>

This is mystery of joy:

- a. Hope and patience in distress with unceasing prayer (Rom. 12:12).
- b. Sharing in the joy of the joyful (Rom. 12:15; 1 Cor. 12:26).
- c. Rejoicing in the joy of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 14:17).
- d. Rejoicing with the wise in that which is good (Rom. 16:19).
- e. Rejoicing at the repentance of our brothers and sisters (2 Cor. 2:2; 7:9).
- f. Rejoicing when we are weak, and our brothers are strong (2 Cor. 13:9).
- g. Rejoicing for the barren who will have children; that is, the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 4:27).
- h. Rejoicing when people preach Christ, whether in pretense or truth (Phil. 1:18).

<sup>725</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 3: p. 41.

<sup>726</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 39.1 (NPNF I/6:389) amended.

<sup>727</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 3 (NPNF I/13:61) amended.

- i. The apostle invites us to lead everyone to rejoice with him (Phil. 2:18, 28).
- j. The apostle rejoices because he fills up in his own flesh whatever is lacking in the afflictions of Christ (Col. 1:24).
- k. We wait with rejoicing till our Lord Jesus Christ returns at His last coming (1 Thess. 2:19).

**3. Peace:** the believer carries within him a peace that cannot be crushed by hardships or sorrows; even if tears run from his eyes, or if he shares the sorrows of others.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “He who seeks after peace, seeks Christ, because ‘he himself is our peace,’ who has made two men into one new man (cf. Eph. 2:14), making peace, and ‘making peace through the blood of his cross, whether on earth or in the heavens’ (Col. 1:20).”<sup>728</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “For man is truly a pacific instrument ... the one instrument of peace, the Word alone by which we honor God, is what we employ.”<sup>729</sup>

In this lies the mystery of peace:

- a. Peace to everyone who works what is good (Rom. 2:10).
- b. Having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 5:1).
- c. The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. (Rom. 14:17).
- d. The God of peace will crush Satan under our feet (Rom. 16:20).
- e. God has called us to peace (1 Cor. 7:15).
- f. God is not a God of confusion, but a God of peace, as in all the churches of the saints (1 Cor. 14:33).
- g. God is the source of peace: “Peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3).
- h. Unity of the Church: for He Himself is our peace, who has made two into one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation (Eph. 2:14, 17).
- i. To emulate the apostles: “The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Phil. 4:9).

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<sup>728</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 16.10 (FOTC 46:266).

<sup>729</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.4 (ANF 2:248).

- j. To flee youthful lusts, but pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart (2 Tim. 2:22).

**4. Long-suffering:** if God is called long-suffering, then it is fitting for us, as His children, to bear the same trait. Thus, we do not seek revenge against those who oppose the truth, no matter how evil they may be. The Son of Sirach says, “A patient man will hold fast until the proper time, then afterwards gladness shall burst forth for him” (Sir. 1:20). This is how he distinguishes the person who is wronged and becomes angry and revolts from the person who falls under oppression, and endures with long-suffering. In the first case, although his anger is based on an injustice that befell him, his anger becomes a burden to him and causes him to fall. But in the second case, he endures for a while in silence, but then joy returns to him, and many testify on his behalf even while he remains silent and does not defend himself.

Sirach also says, “be patient with a man of humble circumstances, and do not keep him waiting for your alms” (Sir. 29:8). Thus does the Son of Sirach call us to be patient with those who are suffering harsh conditions and therefore ask of us a loan or alms. We ought to help the poor and thus fulfill the command; for that is preferable to possessing gold and silver.

**5. Kindness:** exhibiting a wisdom that is neither too lax nor too strict, **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “We must overcome our enemies by gentleness; win them over by forbearance. Let them be punished by their own conscience, not by our wrath. Let us not at once wither the fig-tree, from which a more skilful gardener may yet entice fruit!”<sup>730</sup>

**St. Anthusa** says, “He who loves does not wish to command nor rule, but he feels more grateful being subject and being commanded. He wishes to confer favors rather than to receive them, for he loves, and feels as if he had not gratified his desire.”<sup>731</sup>

**6. Goodness:** what does the apostle Paul mean by goodness? What is its source? It is not *just* moral behavior — it is first and foremost the work of the Holy Trinity in the life of the believer:

- a. It is the gift of the Father to the believer as his child: “Therefore be imitators of God as dear children” (Eph. 5:1).
- c. It is the gift of the risen Christ, as the apostle says, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth” (Eph. 5:8–9). With a love that is put into practice, we imitate God who is the light and we are granted to partake of His nature, such that we are considered “children of light” — there is no place for the darkness of death in us, but rather we receive the light of the resurrection. Through this concept, the apostle teaches us to behave in practice in ways that befit us as children of the light enjoying the power and joy of the resurrection. This is manifested in our daily

<sup>730</sup> Alban Butler, *Lives of the Saints* (Benziger Bros, 1894): p. 175.

<sup>731</sup> “On Ideal Friendship” in A. H. Hyatt, ed., *The Gift of Friendship*, (J.B. Lippincott, 1910): p. 237.

lives and in our private and public behavior, leaving behind the works of darkness that do not befit us.

- d. It is the fruit of the Holy Spirit dwelling in the believer, speaking and working in him, as the apostle says, “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness ...” (Gal. 5:22).

**7. Faith:** which is the fruit of the Spirit in the life of a person who longs for salvation and an eternal inheritance.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “for even from the corruption in our present life we have escaped by no other means than through the faith. Thus shone also all those aforetime, thus Abraham, thus Isaac, thus Jacob, thus too the harlot was saved, the one in the Old Testament, and likewise the one in the New. For, ‘by faith,’ he says, ‘the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace’ (Heb. 11:31). For if she had said to herself, ‘and how can they that are captives and exiles, and refugees, and live the life of vagabond tribes, get the better of us who have a city, and walls, and towers?’ she would have destroyed both herself and them. Which also the forefathers of those who were then saved did suffer. For when, upon the sight of men great and tall, they questioned the manner of victory, they perished, without battle or array, all of them [Num. 13:31–33]. Do you see what a pit is that of unbelief! What a wall that of faith! For the one carried down endless thousands, the other not only saved a harlot, but made her the patroness of so numerous a people!”<sup>732</sup>

**8. Gentleness and humility:** to remove the spirit of anger from ourselves and from our brothers and sisters.

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “Blessed is the man who knows his weakness. This knowledge becomes for him the foundation and the beginning of his coming unto all good and beautiful things. When a man knows and perceives that he really and in truth is weak, then he restrains his soul from profuseness which is dissipation of knowledge and he will augment the watchfulness of his soul. Unless a man has been remiss in some small things and a slight negligence has appeared in him and tempers have surrounded him either with temptations that arouse bodily affections or with temptations which stir the affectable power of the soul, he cannot perceive his own weakness. Then, however, he recognizes the greatness of God’s help by comparing it with his own weakness ... When he knows that he needs Divine help, he will frequently pray. And by much beseeching the heart becomes humble. For there is no man who is needy and asking, without being humble. And God will not despise a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). Until the heart has become humble, it will not rest from distraction.”<sup>733</sup>

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<sup>732</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans 2* (NPNF I/11:350) amended.

<sup>733</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*, trans., A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 8 (104–105): pp. 70–71.

**9. Purity and restraint:** purity of the heart, body, emotions, thoughts, and even dreams.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “It has been proved as well that this union of the soul with the incorruptible God can be accomplished in no other way but by herself attaining by her virgin state to the utmost purity possible,—a state which, being like God, will enable her to grasp that to which it is like, while she places herself like a mirror beneath the purity of God, and molds her own beauty at the touch and the sight of the Archetype of all beauty.”<sup>734</sup>

**10. Obedience:** to God, parents, rulers, Church and civil leaders, and sometimes even to children and youth in order to win them for the Kingdom.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “To sum up, I note the following three kinds of disposition which necessarily compel our obedience:

- a. we avoid evil through fear of punishment and take the attitude of a slave;
- e. or, seeking to obtain a reward, we observe the commandments for our own advantage and in this we are like hirelings;
- f. or else, for the sake of the virtuous act itself and out of love for Him who gave us the law, we rejoice to be deemed worthy to serve a God so good and so glorious and we are thus in the disposition of sons.”<sup>735</sup>

**11. Kindness:** we ought to be kind to everyone we encounter of every social class; and even in dealing wisely with animals and birds, with crops and inanimate objects. For if God created this world for us with all its beauty, then we should avoid spoiling nature as much as we can.

**St. Ambrose of Milan** says, “That good Samaritan, who is a symbol of Christ, is the Guardian of our souls (for the word Samaritan means Guardian), may, I say, not pass by him but tend and heal him. Perchance He therefore passes him not by, because He sees in him some signs of life, so that there is hope that he may recover. Does it not seem to you that he who has fallen is half alive if faith sustains any breath of life? ... Place him upon your beast, give him over to the host, lay out two pence for his cure, be to him a neighbor.”<sup>736</sup>

**12. Generosity and benevolence:** we offer what we can, generously and joyfully, without expecting for anything in return. The apostle speaks of his generosity towards his congregation without any expectation of recompense thus: “And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am loved” (2 Cor. 12:15). He is pleased to offer his possessions, his time, his strength, and all that he has on behalf of his children; even to suffer and die for them. He is like the sun that is itself consumed that it may give light to others.

<sup>734</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* 11 (NPNF II/5:356).

<sup>735</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Long Rules* Preface (FOTC 9:227).

<sup>736</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Concerning Repentance* 1.11.51 (NPNF II/10:338) amended.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “[St. Paul] shrank from no expenditure for those to be saved—words, deeds, his very life. He who submitted himself to countless deaths would not hesitate to spend any money if he had it. Why do I say ‘if he had it,’ when I can prove that he was unsparing of money even when he did not have it? Don’t think that I am speaking in a paradox, but listen again to his own words: *I will most gladly spend and be spent myself for your souls* (2 Cor. 12:15). And addressing the Ephesians he said: *You yourselves know that these hands of mine have provided for my needs and those of my companions* (Acts 20:34).”<sup>737</sup>

**13. Boldness and courage:** to stand on the side of the truth without compromising, at all costs, but wisely; so that the truth may not be corrupted by anger and lack of love. As God says, “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you” (Deut. 31:6). The Lord Christ came to His disciples amidst the raging waves to teach His disciples that afflictions are the time in which the Lord transfigures among His children. He does not take away the pain, but rather appears before their eyes, declaring His presence, His fatherhood, and His care; before calming the waves. He says to them, “Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid” (Matt. 14:27).

**14. Justice and truth:** on the last day the Lord will say, “I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity” (Luke 13:27). When greed rules a person, not only does he hold back from giving what is his to those in need, he even deprives others of what is theirs: he ruins the homes of the poor and dispossesses them; he is not ashamed to violently destroy them. A person who obtains money unjustly and then gives of it as charity practices a charity devoid not only of divine love, but also of even human love; for he wrongs one person to help another.

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “If you offer God a portion of what you have acquired unjustly and by extortion, He will not accept your gift . . . Be merciful to those whom you have oppressed, treat them with mercy and love, deal with them with goodness; for in so doing, you offer mercy and truth. God does not partake in our covetousness, nor does He share with thieves and looters; for though He is capable of feeding the poor whom He has entrusted to us, He seeks the fruits of righteousness and love from people.”

**15. Determination:** the believer lives in the spirit of being resolute with moderation and wisdom so as to neither pressure and crush his brothers, nor to be excessively lenient with them and push them towards indifference. The word of God is gentle with sinners and opens the door of hope to all; yet it is also firm and strong, and does not know “lukewarmness.” It declares the truth and reveals it, and exposes falsehood and crushes it.

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<sup>737</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *In Praise of St. Paul* (Saint Paul Brotherhood Press, 2014) 3: pp. 47–48.

**St. Ambrose** says, “Moreover, due measure befits even our words and instructions, that it may not seem as though there was either too great mildness or too much harshness.”<sup>738</sup> and “when in office, again, it is not right to be harsh and severe, nor may one be too easy; lest on the one hand we should seem to be exercising a despotic power, and on the other to be by no means filling the office we had taken up.”<sup>739</sup>

**16. Self-control:** the apostle says, “Everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown” (1 Cor. 9:25). The Son of Sirach says, “give and receive and deprive yourself, because in Hades there is nowhere to seek luxury” (Sir. 14:16); and “do not walk after your own desires, but restrain your appetites” (Sir. 18:30).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For he that would be a Teacher must first teach himself. For as he who has not first been a good soldier, will never be a general, so it is with the Teacher; wherefore he says elsewhere, ‘Lest when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away’ (1 Cor. 9:27).”<sup>740</sup>

**17. A vision of purpose:** a believer must have a clear vision of his purpose in order to achieve it, and to help his brothers and sisters to conduct themselves in the spirit of truth.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that the aim of the spiritual (gnostic) man is to know God (the Truth) and to see Him<sup>741</sup> face to face. That is, to pass over to the perfection of knowledge of the Divine through faith, through the experience of pure life, and through constant contemplation. If we have passed over from paganism to faith, we ought also to pass over from faith to knowledge;<sup>742</sup> to see God and to know Him. This knowledge is a divine gift that we receive through the Son by accepting Him and imitating Him — that is, through purity of heart. St. Clement of Alexandria says, “Then it follows that the *gnosis*, which is the knowledge and apprehension of things present, future, and past, which is sure and reliable, as being imparted and revealed by the Son of God, is wisdom.”<sup>743</sup>

The apostle Paul stresses our need to keep our goal always before our eyes, saying, “Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). The mystery of the power of the apostle Paul is his awareness that he has not yet reached perfection; an awareness that does not arise from a spirit of despair and negligence, but from a determination to continue striving and struggling. He realizes that the Lord Christ Himself calls him and seeks him in order to redeem him as His son. While he desires to know Christ,

<sup>738</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 2.22.112 (NPNF II/10:60).

<sup>739</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 2.24.120 (NPNF II/10:61).

<sup>740</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* 5 (NPNF I/13:424).

<sup>741</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.10 (ANF 2:262–263).

<sup>742</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.10 (ANF 2:538–540).

<sup>743</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.7 (ANF 2:494).

he knows perfectly well that Christ knows him. The apostle's zeal for his own salvation is nothing compared to the zeal of the Lord Christ to make him His own.

**St. Augustine** says, "Lot's wife [Gen. 19:26], by looking behind, remained motionless. To whatever point then any one has been able to reach, let him fear to 'look back' from thence; and let him walk in the way, let him 'follow Christ.'"<sup>744</sup>

"There remains hope, which, as I think, is compared to an egg. For hope has not yet arrived at attainment; and an egg is something, but not yet the chicken ... Hope therefore exhorts us to this, to despise things present, to wait for things to come; 'forgetting those things which are behind,' let us, with the Apostle, 'reach forth unto those things which are before' (Phil. 3:13)."<sup>745</sup>

The apostle says, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:7–8).

**St. John Chrysostom** comments on this passage saying, "he is reasonably full in offering consolation ... 'A good fight,' he says ... But is that a good fight, where there are imprisonment, chains, and death? Yea, he says for it is fought in the cause of Christ, and great crowns are won in it. There is no worthier than this contest. This crown is without end. This is not of olive leaves. It has not a human umpire. It has not men for spectators. The theater is crowded with Angels. There men labor many days, and suffer hardships, and for one hour they receive the crown, and immediately all the pleasure passes away. But here far otherwise, it continues for ever in brightness, glory, and honor. Henceforth we ought to rejoice."<sup>746</sup>

And the apostle Paul also says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Cor. 9:24–25). The participants in such contests observe a strict diet, abstain from drinking alcohol and delicious foods, are trained to endure heat and cold, and adhere to a demanding regime. The wrestler trains himself and subdues his body to attain the highest possible level as a competitor. Only one can win the prize, and in those days, a wreath of leaves and flowers crowned the head of the victor. But it is a crown that perishes. The faithful, on the other hand, train themselves for the race of life, and all of them can attain the indestructible crown of victory. The boxer trains himself so that when he faces his opponent in the boxing ring, he can strike him with accuracy. If he fails to train well, he will flail his arms left and right, as one boxing the air. He justly becomes an easy

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<sup>744</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 46.10 (NPNF I/6:411).

<sup>745</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* Sermon 55.7 (NPNF I/6:432).

<sup>746</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* 9 (NPNF I/13:509, 511).



target for his opponent. Likewise, the believer must realize the value of his body. That is why the apostle says that he does not wish to be like someone who strikes the air.

**18. A sense of responsibility:** to be committed to fulfilling one's duties and to not take lightly any advice one receives. The apostle says, "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Cor. 9:16). **St. John Chrysostom** says, "I will not stop fulfilling my duty, whatever the reasons may be, for I was placed here for this duty."

**19. Honesty and sincerity:** the believer who is faithful in much as well as in what is least (cf. Luke 16:10) does not forget the love and sincerity of others towards him, but repays love with love, and sincerity with sincerity. At the same time, he seeks the grace of God to help him to repay even evil with good, and to offer help to those who harm him. He refuses to admit enmity into his mind or heart, regardless of the attitude of others towards him.

**20. Perseverance and endurance:** a Godly person never knows despair, even to the last breath, and never stops striving, even on the deathbed. The Son of Sirach calls us to choose friends from among those who persevere rather than those who easily give up. He says, "Persevere with a godly man who you know keeps the commandments, whose soul accords with your soul and will share in your suffering if you fall" (Sir. 37:12).

**St. Anthony the Great** says, "A man cannot become good and wise immediately, but only through much effort, reflection, experience, time, practice and desire for virtuous action. The man who is good and enjoys the love of God, and who truly knows Him, never ceases to do ungrudgingly all that accords with His will. Such men are rare."<sup>747</sup>

**21. Seeing the world through eyes of hope:** the believer focuses not on the difficulties that face him; but on cultivating a spirit of hope, confidence in the grace of Christ, and on the guidance he receives from the Holy Spirit.

**22. Gratitude:** the thought and heart of a believer never ceases to give thanks to God and to everyone, no matter how small the other's gift may be. The apostle says, "in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess. 5:18); and "giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). Always giving thanks is a characteristic of heavenly beings, who, knowing that God is all-wise and all-loving, thank Him for His goodness and His good providence.

Thus, the believer cannot give thanks in everything with his tongue unless he possesses, through baptism, a new heavenly and illuminated nature; so that his heart sings with a never-ending praise of thanksgiving. He feels that he owes his entire life to his heavenly Father, being aware God's fatherhood and immense care for him. Thus, from the depths of his heart,

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<sup>747</sup> St. Anthony the Great, "On the Character of Men and the Virtuous Life: One Hundred and Seventy Texts," in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979): p. 335.

he cries out with praise, and the mouth of his inner man pours forth song, as the children and infants did when the Lord Christ entered Jerusalem. If we embrace the heavenly life in Christ, praise naturally radiates out from the depths of the heart and our entire being responds to it, even in the midst of tribulation.

It was this that bewildered the pagans when they saw Christians praising God in prisons, especially when they were sentenced to death. In the fourth and fifth centuries in particular, the Egyptian monasteries and their valleys were like a paradise, where the uninterrupted sound of praise was the only sound heard, as **St. John Cassian** tells us. The Church proclaims her joyful nature in the Lord with praise in all her liturgies, as well as in the private prayers of each of its members.

**23. Reverence:** we ought to speak with a calm smile and avoid excessively raucous laughter. It is said that Pilate wrote to Herod that the Lord Christ often smiled but was never found laughing, and wept in certain circumstances.

**24. Loving to serve:** whether serving individuals, families, the Church, the nation, or all humanity. The believer strives for the good of all, as much as he can, even those who have committed serious crimes. **St. Augustine** believes that as long as a person is still alive, God hopes for his salvation, no matter how wicked he may be.

**25. Providing service to others:** regardless of age, nationality, gender, religion, principles, or philosophy.

**26. Wisdom and a good counsel:** one should seek good advice, but also take care to give good advice to others, as much as he is able.

**27. Honesty:** if Satan is called a liar and the father of liars (cf. John 8:44), we must hold fast to truth, whatever the cost.

**28. Politeness and good morals:** we ought to treat others with a spirit of reverence and respect in a polite (ethical) manner, remembering that all humanity was created in the image and likeness of God.

**29. Loyalty and faithfulness:** we ought to be loyal and trustworthy in all our affairs; especially at work. We should never follow the principle we sometimes hear — that we should only work as hard as our wages deserve. In all situations, we ought to conduct ourselves faithfully, even with those who treat us unfairly.

**30. To be noble<sup>748</sup> and hardworking:** we should not stop persevering in our work and struggle till the last breath.

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<sup>748</sup> Translator's Note: The Arabic word here, *عصاميين* ('*eisamiayn*'), is difficult to translate into English. It carries connotations both of being self-taught or self-made, and of becoming noble, eminent, distinguished.

**31. Far-sightedness:** we train the young in the spirit of leadership, wisely, according to their individual capabilities, potential, and talents, with the goal that they will one day surpass us in their abilities, talents, and knowledge; and will thus be of service both to society generally and to everyone they meet individually. We never cease to labor, looking ahead to the fruits that will be reaped by the next generation or future generations; for many have planted small trees knowing that it is their children who will eat of their fruits.

**32. Embracing endless learning:** we learn new lessons every day of our lives, even to the last day.

**33. Fulfilling our mission as people of God:** the apostle Paul reminded his congregations that they are ambassadors for Christ (2 Cor. 5:20) and children of God; and that therefore, they ought to be a people of unceasing prayer.

**34. Being prudent:** we ought not to live with a spirit of merely seeking to be entertained, as though our life had no real purpose or value. Rather, we should fix our eyes on the eternal inheritance that we have acquired as a result of the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ that was paid as a gift on the cross. We are called to meet with our Lord on the clouds, for we are the heavenly bride who will meet her heavenly Bridegroom and be led by heavenly choirs in a heavenly procession that brings her into the bosom of the Father.

## 2

### The Virtue of Discernment and Illumination

#### 1188. What is Christian virtue?

Virtue in the heart of the believer in the Church is union with the heavenly Bridegroom, and sharing or partaking of His heavenly attributes, under the guidance of His Holy Spirit. Every morning, when the believer prays the morning prayer and praises, he remembers the resurrection of the Lord Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom, and contemplates the possibility of his own resurrection in Him. He enjoys a new life, heavenly and constantly renewed, that will never wane or grow old. He enjoys the manifestation of the resurrected life in Christ Jesus in his heart and his behavior, as a promise of heavenly perfection.

Following scripture, **St. John Chrysostom** explains that virtue is not just a set of moral principles that we adhere to, but rather, it is first and foremost a union with Christ, who became our righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30).

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “The fountain of every blessing is Christ; ‘Who of God was also made unto us wisdom’: for in Him we are made wise, and filled with spiritual gifts. Now any one who is right-minded will affirm that the knowledge of those things by means of which we may prosper in every method of saintly excellence of life, and advance in virtue, is God’s gift, and one well worthy of our winning.”<sup>749</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** also says:

“‘Be ye therefore perfect, as your Heavenly Father’ (Matt. 5:48). And He intersperses everywhere abundantly the name of the heavens, by the very place thoroughly elevating their minds.”<sup>750</sup>

“How then was that law given in time past, and when, and where? After the destruction of the Egyptians, in the wilderness, on Mount Sinai, when smoke and fire were rising up out of the mountain, a trumpet sounding, thunders and lightnings, and Moses entering into the very depth of the cloud. But in the new covenant not so,—neither in a wilderness, nor in a mountain, nor with smoke and darkness and cloud and tempest; but at the beginning of the day, in a house, while all were sitting together, with great quietness, all took place.”<sup>751</sup>

“... after the resurrection to come had been set before us, demands of us another, even the new conversation, which is brought about in the present life by a change of habits. When then the fornicator becomes chaste, the covetous man merciful, the harsh subdued, even here

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<sup>749</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 119: p. 551.

<sup>750</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 18.9 (NPNF I/10:126).

<sup>751</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 1.3 (NPNF I/10:2).

a resurrection has taken place, the prelude to the other. And how is it a resurrection? Why, because sin is mortified, and righteousness has risen again, and the old life has been made to vanish, and this new and angelic one is being lived in. But when you hear of a new life, look for a great alteration, a wide change.”<sup>752</sup>

“Christ has become all things for you: table, clothing, house, head, and root. *For all you who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ* (Gal. 3:27). See how He has become your clothing. Do you wish to know how He also becomes your food? *As I live through the Father, Christ says, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me* (John 6:58). And He also becomes your house: *He who eats my flesh abides in me and I in him* (John 6:57). And He shows that He is our root and foundation when He says: *I am the vine, you are the branches* (John 15:5). To show that He is your brother, friend, and bridegroom, He says: *No longer do I call you servants, for you are my friends* (John 15:15). Again, St. Paul says: *I betrothed you to one spouse, that I might present you a chaste virgin to Christ* (2 Cor. 11:2). And again: *that He should be the first-born among many brethren* (Rom. 8:29). Not only do we become His brothers but even His children, for He says: *Behold I and my children, whom God has given me* (Isa. 8:18). Not only do we become His children but His members and His Body (1 Cor. 12:27). As if the things already mentioned were not enough to prove the love and kindness which He shows toward us, He set down another thing, greater and more intimate than these, when He spoke of Himself as our Head (Eph. 1:22–23).”<sup>753</sup>

### **1189. How does Christianity understand holiness?**

God who is holy desires that His children be holy, righteous, and virtuous. These cannot be practised by the believer under duress, but must be chosen with perfect freedom; else they lose their authenticity and value. God, who granted His rational creation in heaven and on earth freedom of will cannot consent to compel His creation to practice a virtuous life against their will.

### **1190. How can we acquire holiness and discernment?**

God who is holy is the source of holiness. Whoever enters into fellowship with God becomes aware that he is a child of the holy Father, and the Holy Spirit dwells in him to fashion him into a temple for God, and make him a holy member in the body of Christ. All of this is achieved by the free gift of God’s divine grace.

<sup>752</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 10 (NPNF I/11:405–406) amended.

<sup>753</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Baptismal Instructions* 12.13–14 (ACW 31:176–177) amended.

### **1191. To what extent can we grow in virtue with the spirit of discernment?**

True virtue bestows on us growth in attributes of a heavenly spiritual youth without progression to impotent old age. **St. John Chrysostom** says that for the body, old age comes after youth. But the soul of a true believer will never become old, but will remain in a state of endless youth, if she so wills. He also says that the blessing (of baptism) is great, but if we will, it can become even greater.<sup>754</sup> The Christian does not stop growing, as he moves from a state of spiritual childhood to spiritual maturity. And if he wills, he does not descend into weak and helpless old age but remains always in a state of renewed spiritual youth.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “While the one are punished justly, the others are crowned by grace. For though they had done ten thousand things, the munificence were of grace, that in return for services so small and cheap, such a heaven, and a kingdom, and so great honor, should be given them.”<sup>755</sup> He also says, “For to flee from wickedness is not enough, but you must show forth also great virtue ... the Judge henceforth is coming, His very self, the very Lord of the kingdom, leading unto greater self-restraint, calling us to heaven, and drawing us upward to those abodes.”<sup>756</sup>

### **1192. What do the Church Fathers consider to be the most important virtues?**

**St. Anthony the Great** asked his spiritual sons, the monks, about the most important virtues, and each monk spoke of his own preferred virtue. But St. Anthony he singled out the virtue of discernment, insight, or illumination, saying, “A person can practice many acts of worship, and without discernment he deviates from the path of truth and holiness.”<sup>757</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Our transgressions being taken away by one Pæonian<sup>758</sup> medicine, the baptism of the Word. We are washed from all our sins, and are no longer entangled in evil. This is the one grace of illumination, that our characters are not the same as before our washing [changing our ways]. And since knowledge springs up with illumination, shedding its beams around the mind, the moment we hear, we who were untaught become disciples ... For instruction leads to faith, and faith with baptism is trained by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>759</sup>

**St. Anthony the Great** says:

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<sup>754</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *De Res. Dom. (on the resurrection of the Lord)* (PG 50:441–442A).

<sup>755</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 79.2 (NPNF I/10:457–458).

<sup>756</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 11.3 (NPNF I/10:66).

<sup>757</sup> “St. Antony the Great” in *Early Fathers from the Philokalia*, trans. E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (Faber & Faber, 1981): p.46.

<sup>758</sup> See Homer’s *Iliad*, v. 401.

<sup>759</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.6 (ANF 2:216–217).

“Some have afflicted their bodies by asceticism, but they lack discernment, and so they are far from God.”<sup>760</sup>

“Helmsmen and charioteers gain proficiency through practice and diligence. Likewise those who seek the life of holiness must take care to study and practice what conforms to God’s will. For he who so wishes, and has grasped that it is possible, can with this faith attain incorruptibility.”<sup>761</sup>

“Many have performed truly great labors of virtue, but have ruined themselves through folly. It would not be surprising if the same thing were to happen to you too; if, for example, having cooled towards active work, you begin to imagine that you already possess virtues. For there you have already fallen into that devilish disease (thinking highly of yourself), thinking that you are close to God and are in the light, whereas in actual fact you are in darkness.”

“I know that I am writing to you as to my dear children, and children of promise, and children of the kingdom. That is why I remember you night and day, that God may keep you from all evil, and that you may continually have care how He may give you discernment and new vision, that you may learn to discern the difference between the good and the bad in all things. For it is written, ‘Solid food is for the perfect, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil’ (Heb. 5:14). These are they who have become children of the kingdom, and are reckoned in the measure of adoption, to whom God gives this new vision in all their works, so that none, neither man nor demon, may deceive them. For a believer can be snared by the pretext of the good, and many are thus deceived, since they have not yet received from God this new vision. That is why the blessed Paul, knowing that this is the great wealth of the faithful, says thus, ‘I bow my knees day and night before our Lord Jesus Christ for them, that He may give unto them a revelation in order to know Him, having the eyes of their heart enlightened, so as to know what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the richness of the inheritance of the saints’ (cf. Eph. 3:14, 16, 18.) For since Paul loved them with his whole heart he wanted that great wealth of knowledge, which is the new vision be given to his sons whom he loved; since he knew that, if it were them, they would no longer have labour in any matter, nor would they be afraid with any fear, but the gladness of God would be with them night and day, and the work of God would in all things be for them ‘sweeter than honey and the honey-comb’ (Ps. 19:10). And God would be with them continually, and would give them revelations and great mysteries, which my tongue cannot utter.

<sup>760</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984): p. 3.

<sup>761</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and the Virtuous Life: One Hundred and Seventy Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979): p. 332.

“Now, therefore, my beloved, since you have been counted to me as children, pray both day and night that this gift of discernment may come upon you, which has not yet come upon you since you came to this ascetic way. And I too, your father, will pray for you, that you may attain this stature, to which not many of the monks have come—save a few souls here and there. But if you want to come to this measure, do not be in the habit of mentioning to one another the name of any lax monks among you, but withdraw yourselves from them, or else they will not allow you to progress, but instead will quench your fervour. For the lax have no fervour, but follow their own wills; and if they meet you, they talk of the things of this world, and by such conversation they quench your fervour. For this reason it is written, ‘Quench not the spirit’ (1 Thess. 5:10); for it is quenched by this sort of talk, and by distractions.”<sup>762</sup>

“Know the counsels of the wicked one, for if he comes to you in the guise of one who teaches the truth to deceive you and lead you with cunning or comes to you as an angel of light, do not believe him nor obey him, because he tempts the believers with seductive apparitions that may seem to be true. Beginners cannot discern the trickeries of the adversary whereas the perfect know them as the apostle says: ‘As for strong food, it is for adults who, because of training, have their senses trained to distinguish between good and evil’ (Heb. 5:14). Such people cannot be deceived.”

“Those who do not watch over themselves, are easily caught with a bait that seems to them to be sweet. This is like a fisherman who hides his hook in bait until he catches fish, as Solomon the Wise says: ‘There is a way that appears right to a man, and its consequences are the ways of death’ (Prov. 16:25). He says this of those who do not understand the will of God, but follow their own will. For such people, not knowing the will of God at first receive from Satan a fervor which is like joy, but is not joy: and afterwards it turns to gloom and lays them open. But he who follows the will of God endures great labor in the beginning, but afterwards finds rest and gladness. Satan therefore shows them apparitions and deceptive illusions to puff them up with pride. Other times, he sends them dreams at night that are fulfilled in the morning so that they marvel. In addition to that, he shows them great light during the night that illuminates the entire place they are in, as well as many other signs and deceptive illusions. He does all that so that their hearts may be pleased to accept him as an angel, and as much as they accept him, he casts them down through the spirit of pride which takes hold of them. He thus makes them think of themselves as great and noble spiritual men much more than others, and therefore are not in need of their fathers’ advice. In this the scripture is fulfilled which says that they are fresh clusters of grapes but are bitter and sour. The teachings of the fathers become difficult for them as they think of themselves as knowing all things.”<sup>763</sup>

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<sup>762</sup> St. Ammonas, *The Letters of Ammonas: Successor of St. Antony*, trans., Derwas Chitty (SLG Press, 1979) 4: pp. 6–7.

<sup>763</sup> St. Ammonas, *The Letters of Ammonas: Successor of St. Antony*, trans., Derwas Chitty (SLG Press, 1979) 11: p. 30.



**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “The disciples taught the multitudes this discernment regarding prayer, saying, ‘It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word’ (Acts 6:2–5). What do we learn from this? For those who are not able to remain in prayer [during their lives], it is better to serve [without abstaining from prayer], lest they lose the first and the second. For those who have the ability [to devote themselves to prayer] ... it is better for them that they should not leave what is better.”

**Evagrius Ponticus** says, “Wisdom is associated with serenity [weeping], and true discernment is associated with works. We cannot acquire wisdom without struggling, and we cannot be victorious in struggle without true discernment. Among the works of ‘true discernment’ is to repel the anger provoked by the devils, and to strengthen the power of the soul so that this power can work as much as possible according to its nature. Thus, righteous discernment paves the way to wisdom.”

### **1193. What does the Holy Bible say about discernment and insight?**

In **St. John Cassian’s** second Conference, we read, “Such is discretion, which is not only the ‘light of the body,’ but also called the sun by the Apostle, as it said ‘Let not the sun go down upon your wrath’ (Eph. 4:26). It is also called the guidance of our life: as it said ‘Those who have no guidance, fall like leaves’ (Prov. 11:14 LXX). It is most truly named counsel, without which the authority of Scripture allows us to do nothing, so that we are not even permitted to take that spiritual ‘wine which makes glad the heart of man’ (Ps. 53:15) ... This I say is ‘solid food,’ which can only be taken by those who are full grown and strong, as it is said: ‘But solid food is for full grown men, who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern good and evil’ (Heb. 5:14). And it is shown to be useful and necessary for us, only in so far as it is in accordance with the word of God and its powers, as is said ‘For the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and reaching even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart’ (Heb. 4:12) and by this it is clearly shown that no virtue can possibly be perfectly acquired or continue without the grace of discretion. And so by the judgment of the blessed Antony as well as of all others it has been laid down that it is discretion which leads a fearless monk by fixed stages to God, and preserves the virtues mentioned above continually intact, by means of which one may ascend with less weariness to the extreme summit of perfection, and without which even those who toil most willingly cannot reach the heights of perfection. For discretion is the mother of all virtues, as well as their guardian and regulator.”<sup>764</sup>

<sup>764</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 2.4 (NPNF II/11:309–310).

### **1194. Who can grant us the spirit of illumination or discernment?**

**Abba Moses** says, “For it is no ordinary virtue nor one which can be freely gained by merely human efforts, unless they are aided by the Divine blessing, for we read that this is also reckoned among the noblest gifts of the Spirit by the Apostle: ‘To one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom, to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another the gift of healing by the same Spirit,’ and shortly after, ‘to another the discerning of spirits’ ... You see then that the gift of discretion is no earthly thing and no slight matter, but the greatest prize of divine grace. And unless a monk has pursued it with all zeal, and secured a power of discerning with unerring judgment the spirits that rise up in him, he is sure to go wrong, as if in the darkness of night and dense blackness, and not merely to fall down dangerous pits and precipices, but also to make frequent mistakes in matters that are plain and straightforward.”<sup>765</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “O Light, which Tobias saw (see Tob. 2–4), with his eyes closed, as he taught his son the way of life ... which Isaac saw (Gen. 27:4), when his fleshly eyes were overburdened and closed with old age, and it was granted him, not, indeed, to bless his sons because he recognized them, but, rather, to recognize them as he blessed them; which Jacob saw, when he, also blind because of great age, sent forth rays of light from his glowing heart upon the tribes of people yet to come, as prefigured in his sons.”<sup>766</sup>

“That which You said in the beginning of the creation, ‘Let there be light, and there was light’ — say this now also, so that my eyes may be enlightened by the true light, and that I may distinguish it from other light. Without You, how can I distinguish light from darkness, and darkness from light? ... Yes, away from Your light, truth escapes from me, error approaches me and arrogance fills me ... Confusion becomes discernment, ignorance becomes knowledge and blindness becomes sight.”<sup>767</sup>

### **1195. What is the relationship between the human mind and the spirit of discernment?**

God gave humanity a mind and granted us the gift of discernment so that we might live as rational beings who understand matters around us and seek the knowledge of God. God — who loves humanity — wills that we live in the spirit of understanding and discernment, including in our worship of Him.

**Origen the Scholar** says, “and as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so our mind is possessed with a becoming and natural desire to become acquainted with the truth of God and the causes of things. Now we have received this desire from God.”<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>765</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 2.1 (NPNF II/11:308).

<sup>766</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 10.35(52) (FOTC 21:309).

<sup>767</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, quoted in Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Divine Love* (Arabic), (1967): pp. 74–75.

<sup>768</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.11.4 (ANF 4:298).

Beautifully, **St. Jacob of Sarug** tells us about the significance of the mind in the life of every person. He compares the mind located in the head to the exaltedness of God who dwells on high in the heavens. He says, for example, “Suppose someone say now that the mind has its abode in the brain ... God, too, is seated in glory above the heavens.”<sup>769</sup> He also says, “Let him who comes to church not come without discernment, like a beast in whom there is no understanding. No one visits the physician’s surgery out of mere habit, but only when illness compels him to visit seeking healing.”

The mind plays the role of controlling the human will in a person’s life. Thus, St. Jacob of Sarug cautions us against neglecting to sanctify it. If we sell ourselves into the slavery of bodily desires, the mind will be darkened and the soul will decline and become a slave of the body, such that it will seem to be physical: “The mind is darkened by desires, that it may not understand ... He who is no more than his food has lowered his soul to become flesh.”

### **1196. Does one’s level of discernment depend on one’s age?**

**Abba Moses** says, “Just as all young men are not alike in fervour of spirit nor equally instructed in learning and good morals, so too we cannot find that all old men are equally perfect and excellent. For the true riches of old men are not to be measured by grey hairs but by their diligence in youth and the rewards of their past labours ... ‘For venerable old age is not that of long time, nor counted by the number of years: but the understanding of a man is grey hairs, and a spotless life is old age’ (Wisd. of Sol. 4:8–9). And therefore we are not to follow in the steps or embrace the traditions and advice of every old man whose head is covered with grey hairs, and whose age is his sole claim to respect, but only of those whom we find to have distinguished themselves in youth in an approved and praiseworthy manner, and to have been trained up not on self-assurance but on the traditions of the Elders. For there are some, and unhappily they form the majority, who pass their old age in a lukewarmness which they contracted in youth, and in sloth, and so obtain authority not from the ripeness of their character but simply from the number of their years. Against whom that reproof of the Lord is specially aimed by the prophet: ‘Strangers have devoured his strength and he knew it not: yea, grey hairs also are spread about upon him, and he is ignorant of it’ (Hos. 7:9) and so the subtle enemy uses their grey hairs to deceive the younger men, by a wrongful appeal to their authority, and endeavours in his cunning craftiness to upset and deceive by their example those who might have been urged into the way of perfection by their advice or that of others; and drags them down by means of their teaching and practice either into a baneful indifference, or into deadly despair.”<sup>770</sup>

<sup>769</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Chariot that Prophet Ezekiel Saw*, trans., Alexander Golitzin (Gorgias Press, 2016): p. 42 (267–269).

<sup>770</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 2.13 (NPNF II/11:313–314).

**1197. What is the link between discernment and moderation?**

**Abba Moses** says, “We ought then with all our might to strive for the virtue of discretion by the power of humility, as it will keep us uninjured by either extreme, for there is an old saying ἀκρότητες ἰσότητες [*akrotētes isotētes*], i.e., extremes meet. For excess of fasting and gluttony come to the same thing, and an unlimited continuance of vigils is equally injurious to a monk as the torpor of a deep sleep: for when a man is weakened by excessive abstinence he is sure to return to that condition in which a man is kept through carelessness and negligence, so that we have often seen those who could not be deceived by gluttony, destroyed by excessive fasting ... wherefore as the apostle says ‘with the arms of righteousness on the right hand and on the left’ (2 Cor. 6:7), we pass on with due moderation, and walk between the two extremes, under the guidance of discretion ... For I remember that I had so often resisted the desire for food, that having abstained from taking any for two or three days, my mind was not troubled even by the recollection of any eatables and also that sleep was by the assaults of the devil so far removed from my eyes, that for several days and nights I used to pray the Lord to grant a little sleep to my eyes; and then I felt that I was in greater peril from the want of food and sleep than from struggling against sloth and gluttony. And so as we ought to be careful not to fall into dangerous effeminacy through desire for bodily gratification, nor indulge ourselves with eating before the right time nor take too much, so also we ought to refresh ourselves with food and sleep at the proper time even if we dislike it. For the struggle in each case is caused by the devices of the enemy; and excessive abstinence is still more injurious to us than careless satiety: for from this latter the intervention of a healthy compunction will raise us to the right measure of strictness, and not from the former ... for as the mind which is enfeebled for lack of food loses vigour in praying, while it is worn out with excessive weakness of the flesh and forced to doze, so again when weighed down with over-eating it cannot pour forth to God pure and free prayers: nor will it succeed in preserving uninterruptedly the purity of its chastity, while even on those days on which it seems to chastise the flesh with severer abstinence, it feeds the fire of carnal desire with the fuel of the food that it has already taken.”<sup>771</sup>

**1198. How might we summarize Abba Moses’ advice regarding discernment?**

Discernment is the eye of the heart that sorts our thoughts and actions and discerns between them. It is a divine gift, for which we must persevere in asking fervently of God; that He may grant us *Wisdom* itself. Discernment protects a person against right-hand blows<sup>772</sup> such as being excessive in vigils and fasts or asceticism that can lead a person to fall into vainglory. It protects against left-hand blows such as lethargy and laziness and evil thoughts. The children of God who are humble in their discernment:

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<sup>771</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 2.16–17, 22 (NPNF II/11:316–317).

<sup>772</sup> Translators’ Note: this denotes spiritual temptations that are obvious and direct (right-hand) or hidden and indirect (left-hand).

- a. Do not depend on their own personal thinking but hold fast to the thought and spirit of the early Church Fathers, imitating them in the Lord.
- b. Do not hide any of their thoughts and actions from their father of confession, knowing that an evil thought is broken when it is brought out into the light and its deception is exposed and made manifest.
- c. Gray hair is not in itself a qualification of the shepherd — what matters is that a shepherd be experienced in his communion with the Lord.

### 3

## The Virtue of Obedience<sup>773</sup>

#### 1199. Why do some people resent obedience?

This word has been associated in the minds of many — especially young men — with connotations of having a weak character and being debased by others; whether parents, mentors, community leaders, and whether at school, at work, or in the Church. They see the concept of obedience as an expression of the desire of leaders to control, and to impose their opinions and experience on others. This produces low self-esteem and the desire to rebel, so to speak, if not through overt behavior, at least through internal repression.

Why does God require obedience of us? Does obedience require that the right to engage in dialogue be set aside? Does God call us to blind obedience? What is the purpose of obedience? Does God call us to live in subjugation? Such questions drive us to distinguish between the greatness of biblical obedience and blind obedience, and to correct misconceptions about obedience.

#### 1200. Does obedience imply weakness of character?

I recall a woman once came to me saying that she has a son with a very polite and gentle nature who began to attend a nursery school. After his first day there, he came home and told his mother he had done something wrong, to which his mother responded gently, “Please don’t do that again.” But the child answered, “No, I will do it again.” “I said no ... and no means no” the mother said. Not wanting to damage her relationship with the child, she left the matter there and said no more.

The next day, she asked her son if he remembered their discussion the day before. He said he did. She asked him, “What do you think about what you did?” He answered, “It was wrong.” She asked, “Well, why did you do something you know is wrong?” He answered, “Mum, don’t you realize that if I just say yes to everything, that would mean that I have a weak personality?” The mother was astonished that this was the first lesson he had learned from the other children — that to obey is equivalent to having a weak personality or to being servile.

The mother then dealt with the situation wisely in this way: she did something wrong in front of him, and when he told her it was wrong, she stopped doing it. Two days later she had another conversation with him. She asked him whether he thought that she has a weak character. The child answered, “No. Actually, I love you because you listened to me.” She

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<sup>773</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Social Ethos of the Early Church Fathers (Al-khatu Al-ajtima'i 'Eind Aba' Al-kanisat Al'-uwlāa, Arabic)* (Alexandria, 2005) and Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty and Maged Sous, *Faith and Permissiveness (Al'-iman Wal'-iibaha, Arabic)* (1998).

said, “Obedience and dialogue do not weaken our personalities, they make us more loved and more mature.”

### **1201. Who is the greatest?**

The evangelist Luke says about the child Jesus: “He was subject to them” (Luke 2:51). Who is the greatest: Jesus Christ or Saints Mary and Joseph? There is no comparison between incarnate Word of God, the Creator, and Saints Mary and Joseph; and yet He submitted to them. This was not out of servility, but rather, with a spirit of love and strength He conversed with them. When St. Mary reprimanded Him, saying, “Son, why have You done this to us? Look, Your father and I have sought You anxiously” (Luke 2:48), He answered her, “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). With wisdom, delicacy, and boldness the Boy spoke with His mother, explaining that He had a divine, heavenly message that they could not understand at that time.

A person’s greatness does not lie in issuing orders or prohibitions, but rather in being constantly focused on his mission and working diligently to fulfil it. Thus, he neither seeks authority nor fears obedience and submission in a spirit of wisdom and discernment.

A little child who does not understand his mission becomes angry often and easily. But this is all a sign of his immaturity and his lack of awareness or appreciation of his mission. But the mature person fulfils his mission with a spirit of obedience, submission, delicacy, and civility. *These* are the signs of true maturity and greatness.

### **1202. Is obedience a sign that one shares the attributes of our Lord Jesus Christ?**

The apostle Paul often defended the divinity of the Lord Christ and His equality with the Father in one essence and in unity. Yet, some may be surprised when he says, “Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all” (1 Cor. 15:28). They question how it is that the Son can be subject to God the Father. But subjection here is not to be understood in the human sense that has corrupted the true meaning of obedience and subjection. No, this is the attribute of humility that is characteristic of the second Adam, our Lord Jesus, who said: “learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls” (Matt. 11:29). The soul’s comfort and greatness are to share with her Messiah His attributes of meekness and humility, so that in obedience she finds exalted heavenly comfort and true glory.

### **1203. What is the nature of a ruler or leader?**

St. Pachomius was a military man and known for the extreme strictness with which he governed his monastic communities. He founded more than ten monasteries for men in Upper

Egypt, along with three convents for nuns, and the number of monks in his main monastery in Pbow was about fifteen hundred. He was the abbot superior over all these monasteries.

One day, when St. Pachomius was waiting for the arrival of a group of solitary monks with whom he was to meet, his personal disciple Theodore noticed that his clothes were very old and tattered, and unsuitable for company. Theodore was the one responsible for caring for the clothing of the monks. The disciple asked his teacher to change his robe before he met the guests, but the father paid him no heed. He repeated his request a second time, and a third, but still the father would not change his clothes. Later, when the father examined his own behavior in his cell, he wept bitterly that he had not obeyed his disciple. He went and confessed his sin before his disciples, the monks. Thus, did the founder of the communal monastic life consider falling into disobedience a great defeat. To his mind, obedience is not something practiced by one party alone. For those who live in love and the new life, it is exchanged by both parties with wisdom and discernment.

#### **1204. How do we understand obedience in our meek Christ?**

Obedience is to have the honor of sharing in the attributes of our Christ who is meek and humble of heart. He obeyed the Father, although His will is one with the Father's will. In His love He said, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will" (Matt. 26:39). He does not have a will different to the will of the Father. In saying these words, He bears us within Him, so that we say His words with Him with affection, and so yield our own will to fulfil the divine will that is revealed to us through those around us. The person who insists on his own opinion is far from the spirit of truth and discernment. It has been said that *there are two kinds of people who never change their opinion: the fool and the dead*. But a wise and well-balanced person accepts the opinion of others and is pleased to obey, so long as he is in the right.

At this point, one might ask: *But how do I know the voice of truth that I might obey it? Who can tell me whether the advice given to me is right?* There is a story about a person who, when he was in one of the deserts of northwest Africa, saw from afar what looked to be a huge dust storm. But as the storm drew near, he discovered that the storm was nothing more than a large flock of sheep kicking up the dust as they trotted. Suddenly, six shepherds appeared together, and the flock headed to a stream of water to drink and rest. After some time, one of the shepherds drew himself apart from the other five shepherds and began to sing. A number of sheep left the flock and trotted over to this shepherd, and as he continued to sing, his flock gradually lined up and gathered around him, leaving behind all the rest of the sheep in a big group together. Then, another shepherd withdrew and began to sing, and his flock also gathered around him, and so on with the rest of the shepherds. Having observed this, this person remembered the words of the Lord Christ: "When he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will



by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers” (John 10:4–5).

So, the answer to the question, *how do I know the voice of truth that I might obey it?* is: If you are His friend and you have a real fellowship with Him, you cannot help but know His voice and obey His words through others, especially leaders.

There is another story that during the First World War, on a hill near Jerusalem on a hot day, some soldiers tried to seize a flock while the shepherd was sleeping. The shepherd suddenly woke up and found his flock being led away by the soldiers. Realizing it was hopeless for him to try to stop the soldiers, another idea occurred to him by which he might regain his flock. He crept around them and from a different direction he began to call to his flock with his voice. Immediately the whole flock rushed towards him, and the soldiers were powerless to stop them. While the soldiers were in confusion, the shepherd quickly moved to a safe area with all his sheep following him. The flock knew the voice of its shepherd.<sup>774</sup>

And another story: one day, when thousands were waiting to see a dog show, one of the dogs escaped and made its way into the arena. It wandered about, dashing here and there, heedless of the many voices calling or whistling for it to come to them. Finally, on hearing the whistle of one particular boy from afar, it pelted over to him and jumped into his arms. In the midst of the noise of thousands, the dog had recognised the unique voice of its true owner.

### **1205. Do we listen to the voice of our Beloved?!**

Dr. Lee Robertson tells the following story: one day he happened upon a crowd of people with a dog moving purposefully among them, performing various tricks. He looked about, trying to see what was going on, until he noticed a boy muttering something, to whom the dog was paying intense attention. After a short while, the dog went over to the boy, wagging his tail wildly in obvious elation. The dog fixed his eyes intensely on the boy and then came right up close to him. Robertson felt as if the dog was saying to the boy, “Did I not please you? Did I not completely obey you?” With great affection and gentleness, the boy patted the dog’s head and said to him, “good doggie” over and over. Robertson walked over to the boy and asked him, “If I gave you fifteen dollars, would you sell me this remarkable dog?” At the time this amount was substantial amount of money. But the boy replied, “Even if you gave me a hundred times that amount, I would never give up my beloved dog!” Tears fell from Robertson’s eyes and he withdrew, saying deep in his heart, “This dog knows its owner and how to please and obey its owner. May I, Lord, be the object of Your pleasure and hear Your voice, that I might hear You say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant’ [cf. Matt. 25:21]. Since that day these emotions have never left me!”

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<sup>774</sup> C.f. W. B. Knight, *Knight's Treasury of 4000 Illustrations* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995): p. 441.

**1206. How can we practice obedience if we are simple in knowledge?**

An atheist employer had a very simple and God-loving house-servant, who would not cease to bear witness to the Lord Christ in the spirit of simplicity. One day the master wanted to mock him. He called him and asked him, “Are you a preacher, Sam?” The slave answered him, “I love my Lord Jesus Christ, and I would like everyone to enjoy His love.” The master asked him, “If you are an evangelist, you must know the meanings of the Bible. Tell me what the meaning of this phrase is: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). In simplicity the servant asked him, “Where is this verse, sir?” The master answered him, “In the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans.” Then in simplicity the servant replied, “Dear sir, I will explain this phrase to you very simply. You need to begin with the Gospel of Matthew. And when you carry out everything that our beloved Christ commanded in this Gospel, then start with the Gospel of Mark and do everything that the beloved Lord commanded us in this Gospel. Then the Gospel of Luke and obey all the commandments of the Lord contained in that Gospel. Then the Gospel of John, the Acts of the Apostles, and by the time you get to the Epistle to the Romans, you will find its meaning quite clear and very easy to understand.”

**1207. Shall we not obey the voice of the King of Kings?**

A missionary walked into the dining room of his hotel in India, looking for a place to sit. There were only two empty seats: one next to a commander in the army and the other next to a captain in the navy, with their families. As he approached, he overheard them saying, “Why on earth do missionaries come to India? Aren’t they content just remaining at home?”

The missionary interrupted and asked him: “If you were commanded by your commander in chief to take your troops immediately and go to a designated location in order to engage the enemy in battle, would you delay?” The commander replied, “Impossible! I am obligated to obey my superior and serve my country.” Then the missionary answered him, “O great leader, I am a Christian, and Jesus Christ is my King. I serve him as a citizen of God’s Kingdom. My King has risen from the dead and has entrusted us with a divine responsibility: ‘Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit’ (Matt. 28:19). That is why we missionaries have come here to India, to fulfill the orders of our King and serve his kingdom.”

**1208. What do you think of an obedient person?**

A farmer once saw a group of mounted soldiers riding towards his land from afar. Fearing that they would cross his field and damage his crops, he asked a boy working with him to close the gate to the field. The boy hurried and closed the door. Shortly after, the soldiers came to the gate, and one of them ordered the boy to open it. The boy answered him, “I can’t! My master ordered me to keep the gate closed.” Then the soldier said to him, “Do you know

who I am? I am the Duke of Wellington, and I command you to open the door so that my I and my troops may pass.” The boy raised his hat and saluted the Duke with dignity, then said to him, “I am sure that the Duke of Wellington would not be pleased if I were to disobey my master’s orders, for I am obligated to leave the gate closed and not allow anyone to pass through it except with the permission of my master.” The Duke was impressed by the boy’s loyalty and obedience to his master. The Duke raised his own hat and saluted the obedient and brave boy, saying, “I salute the boy or man who is not afraid to refrain from doing what is wrong.” Then the Duke gave the boy a golden guinea and he and his troops left without entering the field. Thus, obedience makes others respect and appreciate the person who is obedient to his leaders in the Lord.

**1209. Are children, and those who are meant to fully obey those over them, obligated to blindly obey commands that are contrary to a divine command?**

When St. Mary reprimanded her Son, our Lord Jesus, because He remained in the Temple for three days conversing with the teachers and caused her and St. Joseph great anxiety (Luke 2:41–52), He did not apologize in order just to placate her. Rather, with a submissive spirit He calmly explained to her: “Why did you seek Me? Did you not know that I must be about My Father’s business?”

And when the Lord spoke about His crucifixion and death, St. Peter said to him, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!” (Matt. 16:22), and the Lord turned to him and said to Peter, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matt. 16:23).

**1210. What does St. Basil think about obeying what is contrary to a divine commandment?**

One of the foundations of the Basilian monastic order is obedience, which is why it is often mentioned in the writings of the saint, especially in his ascetic writings and monastic laws. Here are some of his principles:

- a. If anyone feels that a remedy given by the superior is contrary to a divine commandment, he must object privately; and if he finds no response, object openly.
- b. If a monk disagrees with his superior but realizes that his superior’s command does not affect a divine commandment, he should remain silent.
- c. If a monk doubts a matter, and is unable to make a decision, not knowing whether a command of the superior is against a divine commandment or not, he must resort to others. If they find that what the superior asks is contrary to the Holy Bible, then he has saved himself and his brothers from disobedience to the commandment of God.

- d. A monk ought not be the cause of vain and dangerous discussions about the decisions of the superior as long as he is not sure whether they are against the divine commandment or not; so as not to become a stumbling block to those who are simple in faith.
- e. The saint warns that those who just want to rebel and be stubborn, and who provoke long disputes without a cause, must be expelled from the community.

**1211. What should a believer do if he asks someone to do something and that person wants to challenge that request?**

- a. We ought not to ask others to obey us without dialogue and explanation. God Himself opened the door of dialogue with Abraham, who felt that the act of destroying Sodom and Gomorrah was unbecoming of a just God (Gen. 18:25).
- b. We ought to give our children and subordinates the opportunity to dialogue with us in the spirit of love, so that they might feel our appreciation for their personalities as people who have the right to argue with their parents. We ought not to expect them to submit with blind obedience, as if they were irrational beings.

**1212. What should a believer do if he notices that someone in authority is violating a divine commandment?**

- a. He should hold in his heart the words of Isaiah the Prophet: “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil” (Isa. 5:20). We can neither allow light to become darkness, nor consider darkness to be light.
- b. If we see a person breaking a commandment or if we think that he has deviated from the true faith, we need to consider the following factors in our behavior towards him:
  - If we have a close relationship with him, we should ask him about the matter as one who inquires, not as one who criticizes.
  - If we do not have a close relationship with him, we should appeal to someone who does have such a relationship with him, and who is wise in his words and actions.
  - We should always keep in mind that we ought not try to expose him, even among friends, and even if he is wrong. Rather, we imitate our God who covers us, without neglecting our evil.

We need to dedicate prayer, fasting, and prostrations so that the Lord Himself takes over the matter, and may God protect us from exposing others, but grant us a spirit of love, meekness, and humility.

### 1213. Why do we need a civil state, with laws and leaders to be obeyed?

The Church Father **Lactantius** (third-fourth centuries A. D.) considers the formation of political states, in which people can live their lives, to be a natural consequence of the social nature of humanity. The state is a necessary means to control violence by enforcing submission to a certain code in a lawful manner, thus constraining those who wish to do evil. Such laws are necessary because of ancestral sin, and the entry of evil into human life.

**St. Ambrose** observes that when we study the organized societies of birds, bees, and fish, we see that we too need social organization and laws through which the state manages the affairs of society. In his view, had it not been for the Fall, the state would have exercised its authority in a spirit of cooperation for the general good. But the Fall produced a lust for domination and greed, which motivates some rulers of the state to strive for power and their own personal interests at the expense of the public interest. In his view, the state is established with the aim of curbing and deterring evil; but unfortunately, rather than fighting evil, evil can become a feature of the state (when its leaders are evil). However, no authority is evil in itself.<sup>775</sup> The king (or the leader) is a representative of God if he uses his authority well.<sup>776</sup>

**St. Augustine** believes that, had humanity not fallen into sin, there would have been no need for laws to restrict their behavior or for the authority of the state to maintain peace for all people. The state maintains earthly or external peace. Augustine calls this the “peace of Babylon,” which is not comparable to the true peace of the city of God, or the heavenly peace. Earthly peace is based on compulsion and oppression with punishment; and this is achieved through political power, which is in the hands of people that are prone to making mistakes. But the people must not rebel against the ruler, but rather accept the punishment which they suffer because of their rebellion, just as it is fitting for them to pray that He will forgive those who wronged them.<sup>777</sup>

### 1214. What is the Christian attitude towards the earthly city and the city of God?

God wants states that exercise their authority according to God’s will: that is, that do not know tyranny, but rather care for the material, moral, and religious needs of their citizens. **St. Augustine’s** views on the state appear in his book, *The City of God* where he talks about the earthly city or the state. We ought not condemn the state, except when its practices are corrupt, when it exploits the poor, and when its power is tyrannical.<sup>778</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For I have therefore brought forward these that are of all most important, that when it shall have been seen to be superior to them, its victory over the rest may be unquestioned. Whereby then shall we show that it is more necessary than all? ...

<sup>775</sup> St. Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. Lucam*, 11: 29–31.

<sup>776</sup> St. Ambrose, *Expos. Evang. Lucam*, 11: 29–31.

<sup>777</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* 19.26–27 (NPNF I/2:419).

<sup>778</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* 4 (NPNF I/2:64ff).

For, as it is, the fear of the ruler restrains them [the citizens] and protects that which is wrought by them; but if you take this away, in vain is their labor.”<sup>779</sup>

### 1215. What are the duties of citizens towards their state?

- a. **St. Augustine** believes that the people are obligated to obey the authorities of the state as God commands.<sup>780</sup>
- b. Christians ought to be among the best citizens of the state.<sup>781</sup>
- c. They are obligated to pay taxes.<sup>782</sup>
- d. Christians should submit to temporal justice.

**St. Ambrose** confirms the legitimacy of the judicial system in the empire. Therefore, Christians should be faithful in observing civil laws and respecting the social order, so long as these are not in conflict with the divine commandment.

### 1216. What do we consider to be the ideal civic authority?

The Church Fathers often spoke of the blessings of having a state. If both the leaders and the people walk in the spirit of justice with love and holiness, both parties are content. Everyone works joyfully when authority is exercised by holy leaders in the spirit of fatherhood and compassion; for the leaders can find their happiness, wealth, and dignity in the happiness, wealth, and dignity of every member of the community. A community of the holy vie with each other to sacrifice and give to others, and delight in such faithful works.

**St. Ambrose** believes that in early human societies, responsibilities were allotted in rotation, leaving no room for arrogance among them. But when the lust for power entered them, they began to contend over who would occupy positions of power. St. Ambrose says, “From the beginning men began in this manner to establish a political system based on nature, with the birds as models. Thus there was equal participation in both labor and office. Each individual in his turn learned to set up a division of responsibilities, to take his share in doing service and in supervising it. Thus no one was devoid of office and no one was without his allotment of work. Here was an ideal state where no one became accustomed to unbroken power. Again, no one was intimidated by a long period of servitude, because advancement, due to interchange of office and to the fitting measure of its duration ... But when the lust

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<sup>779</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Second Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 15.3 (NPNF I/12:353) amended.

<sup>780</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume III: Sermons 51–94*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1991) 62.13: p. 163.

<sup>781</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 4.73: p. 115.

<sup>782</sup> St. Augustine, *Letters* 96 (NPNF I/1:404–405).

for domination began to arrogate to itself powers that were acquired, and when this same lust encouraged unwillingness to relinquish powers that were assumed.”<sup>783</sup>

He also says, “No virtue produces more abundant benefits than Equity or Justice, which is more concerned with others than with itself, neglecting its own advantages, and preferring the common good ... Justice, on the other hand, is the most important as it represents the concord of all the other virtues.”<sup>784</sup>

**1217. What does the apostle Paul say about submission to authorities in the Lord?**

The apostle Paul says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same” (Rom. 13:1–3); and “therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:1–3). Christianity calls for obedience to authorities and submission to the state, for its concern is for inner peace, pardon for sinners, and not using the sword. The believer is obliged to implement these commandments, desiring to offer love even to enemies who oppose him, through the work of the Holy Spirit in him.

**1218. What does the apostle mean when he says, “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Rom. 13:1–2)?**

Does this mean that all rulers, even those who are evil, are appointed by God? In fact, it is the *system* of leaders and rulers that is appointed by God, and not the *individual* persons themselves. The apostle calls us not to oppose the existence of a state system because such systems are permitted by God for the sake humanity’s edification and peace; and for our protection from evildoers, such as murderers, thieves, slanderers, deceivers, etc. However, not every ruler is appointed by God. We would not say that Nero the oppressor was appointed God, nor Julian the Apostate, nor Arianus the governor of Ansenia, etc.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “And the first claim such an enactment has upon us, and the reasoning that suits the faithful, is, that all this is of God’s appointment. ‘For there is no power,’ he says, ‘but of God.’ What say you? it may be said; is every ruler then elected by God? This I do not say, he answers. Nor am I now speaking about individual rulers, but about

<sup>783</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Hexaemeron* 5.15.52 (FOTC 42:201–202).

<sup>784</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Paradise* 3:18 (FOTC 42:298).

the thing in itself. For that there should be rulers, and some rule and others be ruled, and that all things should not just be carried on in one confusion, the people swaying like waves in this direction and that; this, I say, is the work of God’s wisdom. Hence he does not say, ‘for there is no ruler but of God’; but it is the thing he speaks of, and says, ‘there is no power but of God.’”<sup>785</sup>

The scholar **Origen** believes that the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 13:1, namely “for there is no authority except from God,” contains a warning to corrupt authorities. For authority is a gift and a talent from God that should not be used arrogantly for the sake of one person, but for service and benefit of society. These are talents for which they will give account. Origen says, “There is no one who does not know that even sight is a gift from God to us, as well as hearing and the ability to think. Well then, though we have these things from God, it nevertheless is within our authority to make use of our vision either for good things or evil things ... the judgment of God is just (cf. 2 Thess. 1:5) because we misuse these things that he has given for good use, for impious and wicked service. So then, all authority has also been given by God ‘to punish those who are evil but to praise those who are good’ (1 Pet. 2:14); just as the same Apostle says in what follows (cf. Rom. 13:3–4). But the judgment of God will be just in respect to those who govern the authority they have received in accordance with their own impieties and not in accordance with God’s laws.”<sup>786</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “it is right to submit to higher authority wherever a command of God would not be violated.”<sup>787</sup>

### 1219. What are the roles of civil and Church leaders?

The scholar **Origen** believes that the words of the apostle Paul in Romans 13:1 — “for there is no authority except from God” — refer to the responsibility of authorities to impose punishments for crimes. Church leaders do not have this right — their responsibility is to teach, warn, and draw souls into communion with God. Origen says, “The worldly judge fulfills the greatest part of God’s law. For all the crimes that God wants to be punished, he has willed that they be punished not through the priests and leaders of the churches, but through the worldly judge.”<sup>788</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** believes that this verse justifies a judge who is a believer in applying penalties to criminals with a clear conscience. St. John Chrysostom says, “For he is the Minister of God to you for good ... by chastising the wicked, by benefiting and honoring the good, and by working together with the will of God.”<sup>789</sup> The Christian judge has the right to forgive those who stole something from him, but he does not have the right to pardon

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<sup>785</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 23 (NPNF I/11:511).

<sup>786</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10* 9.27.26 (FOTC 104:223).

<sup>787</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *The Morals* 79:1 (FOTC 9:196).

<sup>788</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10* 9.28.2 (FOTC 104:225).

<sup>789</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 23 (NPNF I/11:512) amended.



someone who steals something from others or breaks laws. Rather, he is obliged to apply the criminal or civil law, and by doing so, he is considered a servant of God.

**1220. What are the limits of the role of the Church and the Christian in politics?**

- a. If the Church is meant to be a holy leaven in the world, contributing to its edification, growth, and progress in all aspects of life; then the Church must know her role, responsibilities, and rights. The Church, as the mother of humanity, must not be drawn into politics, for this may lead her to favor groups or persons at the expense of others. But she must be a loving mother to all. Thus, the Church is not permitted to establish a political party, nor to push her children to support or join a particular party.
- b. In imitation of her Creator and Savior, the Church must vouchsafe free will. Our Creator who knows all things vouchsafes humanity complete freedom while at the same time offering him the support and guidance of His divine grace. He does not cause the sun to shine upon believers but withhold it from unbelievers; nor does He cause rain to fall upon the righteous but withhold it from the wicked [cf. Matt. 5:45]. He loves all and gives every person complete freedom to choose his way, his agenda, and his behavior. This is how the Church works to support every person as much as she can to have a mature personality. Thus, we can all practice our spiritual, social, and intellectual lives, and can flourish in all things. It is not the right of the Church or the father of confession to control anyone like an instrument in his hand; but the human dignity of all should be respected, even the small child. We must respect every person's human freedom, value his opinions, support him, and help him within appropriate limits, thus respecting the intellect, thinking, and talents with which God has endowed him. No one — whatever his social or ecclesiastical position — has the right to compel another to join or withdraw from a particular political party.
- c. Church leaders should encourage (but not obligate) every Christian to positively engage with the society around them. The Church needs always to be aware of the role of the holy God in the life of humanity. The more the Church is sanctified and lives in the fear of God in the spirit of love and humility, the more she truly engages with humanity. Thus, she becomes a sacrament of blessing and a true support for the person, the family, society, and the world.
- d. The role of the Church is to pray wholeheartedly for the state and its leaders in all aspects of their work, and for the peace of the whole world. She encourages her children to do likewise, so that God may work to guide the leaders for the edification of all.

### **1221. What is the stance of the Church and the believer towards corruption?**

The Lord Christ calls us to love our enemies and to refrain from condemning others; so the believer should be occupied with sanctifying his own inner depths through clinging to the Holy One, rather than with condemning others. This love is in harmony with the truth. When the servant of the high priest transgressed against the Lord Christ as He neared crucifixion, the Lord Christ objected, saying, “If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why do you strike Me?” (John 18:23).

A believer should not flatter at the expense of holiness. A Church that does not interfere in politics and helps its youth to develop a healthy personality cannot accept corruption. It is the right of young people to participate in protests against corruption, so long as it is in a spiritual manner filled with love, with firmness and courage, and without engaging in violence or vandalism. It is also the right of the Church and the faithful not to withdraw into themselves because of the injustice they suffer, but to lobby the authorities in a spirit of respectful dialogue to remedy the injustice from which they suffer, always without any sense of hostility or violence.

The source of a holy life is the holy God, who grants it to those who faithfully and sincerely seek God’s work in them, their family, their neighbors, and all humanity; who strive in prayer, fasting, and love in an exemplary manner. That is why it was said of the servants of the house of the Lord: “They were very able men for the work of the service of the house of God” (1 Chron. 9:13). When Phinehas, the priest, was appointed as chief over all the guards of the house of the Lord, the Holy Bible identified his wonderful secret weapon: “The Lord was with him” (1 Chron. 9:20). Our battle is for deliverance from corruption through continual repentance, and continuous growth through clinging to the Holy One. That is how we recover the lost image of God and attract many souls to receive the Holy God to reign within them.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** says, “It is not a great thing that we invite you to build a city. Rebuild yourself demolished self, O penitent, that is a great thing. This (soul) is greater than the everything in the world. It is not higher than one place, but higher than all places ... To build city walls is not worthy of praise. As for the soul that has fallen to rise again, it is a great honor.”<sup>790</sup>

### **1222. What is the virtue of honoring parents?**

I have kept the discussion of the virtue of honoring and obeying parents until the end because the Holy Bible ascribes to it a special importance. The apostle says, “‘Honor your father and mother,’ which is the first commandment with promise” (Eph. 6:2).

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<sup>790</sup> See the *Memre on Repentance* at the Monastery of St. Macarius.

The very law of nature engraves this commandment on the heart. Children feel a natural obligation to obey their parents due to the strong bond of being related in the flesh and blood; and children appreciate the burdens and sleepless nights that parents endure for the sake of their children. There is no one who cares more for the welfare, flourishing, and success of a person than his parents. God granted to the mother the gift of laboring joyfully and cheerfully for the sake of her children. God invokes a mother's love for her children as a metaphor of His watchful care for us: "Can a woman forget her nursing child, and not have compassion on the son of her womb? Surely they may forget, yet I will not forget you" (Isa. 49:15). The Law of Moses pronounces this commandment and emphasizes it (Ex. 20:12; Deut. 5:16; 27:16). When humanity failed to fulfill the law of nature, the Lord prioritized it even over sanctifying His sabbaths: "Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths: I am the Lord your God" (Lev. 19:3). And there are many strict injunctions against breaking this law:

"He who strikes his father or his mother shall surely be put to death ... and he who curses his father or his mother shall surely be put to death" (Ex. 21:15, 17; Lev. 20:9)

"'Cursed is the one who treats his father or his mother with contempt.' And all the people shall say, 'Amen!'" (Deut. 27:16)

"Whoever curses his father or his mother, his lamp will be put out in deep darkness" (Prov. 20:20)

"The eye that mocks his father, and scorns obedience to his mother, the ravens of the valley will pick it out, and the young eagles will eat it" (Prov. 30:17).

Finally, God did not leave humanity to labor under these bitter chastisements but sent His only-begotten Son Himself to represent humanity and manifest perfect obedience to His Father even unto death, the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8). He even submitted to St. Mary, His mother according to the flesh, and to Joseph the Righteous who adopted Him (Luke 2:51). Thereby He became a living example for us.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, "The first virtue of godliness in Christians is to honour their parents, to requite the troubles of those who begat them, and with all their might to confer on them what tends to their comfort ... that they also may enjoy the comfort provided by us, and may confirm us in those blessings which Jacob the supplanter shrewdly seized; and that our Father in heaven may accept our good purpose, and judge us worthy to *shine amid righteous as the sun in the kingdom of our Father* (Matt. 13:43)."<sup>791</sup>

And the scholar **Origen** says, "Let us learn, my beloved, to submit to our parents ... Jesus submitted (to His parents) and became an example for all children in submission to their parents or their caretakers if they were orphans ... If Jesus, the Son of God, submitted to

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<sup>791</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 7.16 (NPNF II/7:47).

Mary and Joseph, should I not submit to the bishop whom God appointed for me as a father? Shall I not submit to the priest chosen by God’s will?”

**St. Augustine** says, “The world was subject unto Christ, and Christ was subject to His parents”<sup>792</sup>

In a letter of **St. Jerome** to a mother and her daughter between whom a dispute had arisen, he writes, “The Lord Jesus was subject to His parents. He revered that mother of whom He was Himself the parent; He respected the foster-father whom He had Himself fostered ... well, I shall say no more to the mother, for perhaps age, weakness, and loneliness make sufficient excuses for her; but to you the daughter I say: “Is a mother’s house too small for you whose womb was not too small?”<sup>793</sup> The Lord places honoring our parents at the forefront of those commandments that concern our relationships with others. He commands us to honor them before He commands “you shall not kill” or “you shall not commit adultery” etc. It is the only commandment associated with a reward or a promise (Eph. 6:2); and He gave children the right to reason with their parents, yet obey them in the Lord (Eph. 6:1) — not absolute obedience, as some of the Jews misconstrued it.

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<sup>792</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 1.19 (NPNF I/6:252).

<sup>793</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 117.2 (NPNF II/6:216).



## 4

# The Virtues of Chastity and Purity<sup>794</sup>

### 1223. What are the virtues of chastity and purity?

Purity is a positive virtue: communion with the Holy One, that we may become an icon of the heavenly and holy Bridegroom, and may be made ready for the heavenly marriage feast as a holy, pure, and perfect bride. Purity or holiness is the gift of God the Father in His Holy Son through the work of the Holy Spirit. Purity, or having a clean heart, concerns a person's whole being: soul, body, mind, emotions, abilities, energies, thoughts, words, and actions. It is life in the holy Christ that is expressed in our whole being as the believer cherishes the image of God within him that was distorted through sin and was restored to him through the cross. Unfortunately, we often view purity only as a negative virtue, as if it were nothing more than abstinence from sinful bodily actions, evil thoughts, inappropriate language, and every foul behavior. But if we think this way, we devalue the virtue of purity, for we treat purity as something that does not exist, whereas impurity and corruption are things that do exist; and so, purity is nothing more than the absence of the latter.

However, God's pleasure is to see His children pure in everything as He is pure (1 John 3:3), perfect as He is perfect (Matt. 5:48) and holy because He is holy (Lev. 11:44–45). **Chromatius of Aquileia** says, "So the Lord shows that it is pure-hearted people like this who are blessed. They are the ones who, living by faith in the Lord with a pure mind and unstained conscience, will win the right to see the God of glory in the heavenly kingdom to come, 'no longer in a mirror and in a riddle, but face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12), as the apostle related."<sup>795</sup>

### 1224. How did purity, innocence, and chastity attract pagans to accept the Christian faith in the early Church?

The scholar **Athenagoras** praises purity as one of the sublime fruits of Christian life. He points out its positive purpose thus: "You would find many among us, both men and women, growing old unmarried, in hope of living in closer communion with God."<sup>796</sup>

Further, the noble martyr **Apollonius** compiles this list of virtues for Perennis the ruler: "For He taught us to pacify anger, to moderate desire, to abate and diminish appetite, to put away sorrow, to take part in pity, to increase love, to cast away vainglory, to abstain from taking vengeance, not to be vindictive, to despise death, not indeed from lawlessness, but as bearing with the lawless; to obey the laws of God, to reverence rulers, to worship God, to

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<sup>794</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* (NPNF II/3:379–396; FOTC 16:189–234).

<sup>795</sup> Chromatius of Aquileia, *Sermons and Tractates on Matthew* Tractate 17.6.4 (ACW 75:183).

<sup>796</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 33 (ANF 2:146).

intrust the Spirit to immortal God, to look forward to judgment after death, to expect rewards after the resurrection to be given by God to those who have lived in piety.”<sup>797</sup>

In the book called the **Shepherd of Hermas** we find this outline of the principles of the virtues: “For from faith arises chastity; from chastity, intelligence; and from intelligence, love. The deeds, then, of these are pure, and chaste, and divine.”<sup>798</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “A little while ago your feet were running off to the temples of demons; now let them run to the Church of God. Previously they were running off to shed blood (cf. Prov. 1:16; Isa. 59:7); now let them run out to save it. Earlier your hands were stretched forth to plunder the property of others; now stretch them forth to lavish your own goods upon others. Previously your eyes were looking around for a woman or some property to lust after (cf. Matt. 5:28); now let them look around for the poor, the weak, the needy, in order to show them mercy ... Let the tongue, which was accustomed to abuse, cursing, and obscene speech, now be converted to blessing the Lord at all times (cf. Ps. 34:1).”<sup>799</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Here we are instructed to marvel at the unspeakable benevolence of God in Christ Jesus and with the greater fear to cleanse ourselves of every defilement of the flesh and the spirit.”<sup>800</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “That continence, the true continence which is from above, does not wish to repress certain evils for the sake of others, but to heal all evils through goods.”<sup>801</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “These three things that God requires of all the baptized: right faith in the heart, truth on the tongue, temperance in the body.”<sup>802</sup>

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “We who have received baptism offer good works, not by way of repayment, but to preserve the purity given to us.”<sup>803</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “Perhaps these examples have led us gradually on to the discovery that we can be changed into something better than ourselves; and it has been proved as well that this union of the soul with the incorruptible Deity can be accomplished in no other way but by herself attaining by her virgin state to the utmost purity possible,—a state which, being like God, will enable her to grasp that to which it is like, while she places herself

<sup>797</sup> “The Martyrdom of Apollonius” in H. Musurillo (trans.) *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Clarendon Press, 1972): p. 101.

<sup>798</sup> *Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)*, Vision 3.8 (ANF 2:15).

<sup>799</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10* 6.4.2 (FOTC 104:11).

<sup>800</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Concerning Baptism* 1.2 (FOTC 9:374).

<sup>801</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 13.28 (FOTC 16:225).

<sup>802</sup> Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, trans., Benedicta Ward (Liturgical Press, 1984): p. 45.

<sup>803</sup> St. Mark the Ascetic, “On the Spiritual Law, Two Hundred Texts” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979): p. 127.

like a mirror beneath the purity of God, and moulds her own beauty at the touch and the sight of the Archetype of all beauty.”<sup>804</sup>

“Changing in everything for the better, let him exchange ‘glory for glory’ (2 Cor. 3:18), becoming greater through daily increase, ever perfecting himself, and never arriving too quickly at the limit of perfection. For this is truly perfection: never to stop growing towards what is better and never placing any limit on perfection.”<sup>805</sup>

“We see, then, that the Bride is being led by the Word through the ascents of virtue up to the heights, just as if she were climbing stairs. To this Bride the Word first of all sends in, through the prophetic windows and the law’s lattices, the ray of the commandments and summons her to draw near to the light and to become beautiful once, in the light, she has been given the shape of the dove. Then, when she has shared, as far as is possible for her, in the good things, he draws her toward participation in the transcendent Beauty just as though she had hitherto had no part in them at all. The result is that it seems to her that desire increases in proportion to her progress toward that Light which eternally shines out and at the same time that her ascent is just beginning, on account of the transcendence of the good things, which are always beyond her. That is why he says once again to the awakened soul, *Rise up*, and to the soul that is coming, *Come!*

“For to one who has risen up in this manner there will never be wanting an uprising without end; nor for one who runs to the Lord will opportunity for the divine race be used up. For it is always necessary to rise up, and it is never right for those who are drawing near by their running to halt. For that reason, as often as he says *Rise up!* and *Come!* he confers the capacity for an ascent toward what is better.

“This is also the meaning of what comes next in the passage, for he who commands virtue to be born of virtue straight way appends the apostolic counsel by prescribing that the same image ‘be transformed from glory to glory’ (2 Cor. 3:18), meaning that glory is always being received and that what is forever being discovered, no matter how great and exalted it is, is believed to be less than what is hoped for. So it is, then, that the bride is commanded, dove though she was in her former achievements, to become nothing less than a dove again by being transformed for the better; and if this comes to pass, the Word, when next he uses the word dove, will again refer to what lies beyond this.”<sup>806</sup>

### **1225. Can I live chastely?**

God created the human being, and there is an inner yearning within him for a life of transcendence and purity. He desires to rise above all lusts and to tread carnal pleasures

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<sup>804</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginit*y 11 (NPNF II/5:356).

<sup>805</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Perfection* (FOTC 58:122).

<sup>806</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 5: p. 173.



underfoot. Even adulterers who are caught up in the violent current of sin, who take delight in its lusts, and expend all their energy to satisfy these lusts, sometimes in the midst of the most pleasurable periods of lust feel within themselves a secret and deep desire for a life of purity and chastity. Chastity, as defined by **St. John Climacus**, is, “That we put on the angelic nature. Purity is the longed-for house of Christ and the earthly heaven of the heart. Purity is a supernatural denial of nature.”<sup>807</sup> Yet despite all these longings, some still think that these are just words that have no place except in a dictionary, or in the fantasies of religious people and their writings, or perhaps only in the lives of little children or elderly people or monks, nuns, and hermits who live far from evil, or perhaps among angels and heavenly beings alone. Therefore, they commonly ask:

- a. Why does God ask us to do something of which we are incapable?
- b. Does God wish to aggravate us?
- c. Why did He give us a body with these instincts?
- d. Can a normal person control himself in the face of temptations and the lust of the flesh?
- e. What good is it to live a chaste life that prevents a person from satisfying his desires and instincts as he wishes?

Here we might recall the words of **St. Augustine** who experienced sin in its ugliest forms; even though, as he put it, he would often say, “‘Give me chastity and self-restraint, but not just yet.’ I was afraid that You would quickly heed my prayer, that You would quickly cure me from the disease of lust, which I preferred to be appeased rather than to be abolished.”<sup>808</sup> But he later experienced the life of chastity and even celibacy of the highest degree when he came to love the Lord passionately and drew many to Him.

### 1226. What is the life of chastity?

**St. Augustine** says, “Not everyone who controls himself or denies himself from satisfying his lusts or seeks chastity is ‘chaste,’ for many have searched for chastity but found something other than chastity.” Chastity is the gift of God, who wants you to be holy as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:16). Knowing your weakness and insufficiency, He does not ask you to solve the problem on your own. Rather, He wants to grant you the chastity that comes from Him. You are the bride of the Lord Jesus, and as the loving Bridegroom of humanity, He desires your holiness, and cares for you more than you care for yourself. The Lord Jesus is your holiness: “We were buried with Him through baptism into death ... knowing this, that our

<sup>807</sup> St. John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 15.1: p. 146.

<sup>808</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 8.7.17 (FOTC 21:213–214).

old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:4–6).

Knowing that you are incapable by yourself of sanctifying your soul and body, He granted you the Mystery of Chrismation, of the fiery Holy Spirit who is capable of burning away the thorns of sin. The life of chastity is the work of the Holy Spirit, who guides the hearts of those who strive. He rebukes your heart, holds your hand, and walks with you in the way of the crucified Lord who rose from death. O child of God, have no fear of the fires of sin, for He changed the nature of fire around the three youths who trusted Him, and the Son of God walked with them in the midst of the furnace as if in a pleasant paradise (Dan. 3:25) — He himself dwells in you and consumes the fires of lust.

**1227. If He wished us to be holy, why did He give us a body with such instincts?**

Do not fear, for the body’s urges, passions, and outbursts are not of your own making, but are the creation of the good God who loves humanity; and all that He creates is good. The very impulses that destroy your relationship with the Lord are the selfsame impulses that aid you in the way of the Lord — when they are surrendered into the hands of the Holy Spirit.

The body in its entirety is, as **St. John Chrysostom** says, “as a harp beneath a harper, and as a ship under the pilot. And these are not contrary to those who guide and use them.”<sup>809</sup> Sin entered both the soul and the body of the human being together, and so the whole person was corrupted. But, being the weaker of the two, it was to the body that evil deeds were attributed, and a sinful person came to be called “carnal.”<sup>810</sup> Balance in the human being was disturbed, and he lost control. He needed a helper to support his soul in ruling the body and the body in submitting to the soul. This Helper is the Holy Spirit.

**1228. What do these words of the apostle mean: “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16)?**

When your entire body was anointed with Holy Myron oil, the Holy Spirit dwelt in you, and you were sanctified and set aside to the Lord alone. The more you submit in cooperation with the Holy Spirit, the more will the members of your body be sanctified to Him and help you on the path of life. For example: the instinct of love, which sin uses as an instrument of iniquity for death, makes you, by the help of the Holy Spirit, a lover of the Lord and an instrument of righteousness that bears fruit for God. The instinct of wrath provokes you against your fellow human; but if you strive by surrendering to the Holy Spirit, you will rebel against your own sin and lust. In the life of one who strives with the help of the Holy Spirit, the instinct of fear is no longer a source of terror and fear of people, but instead says, “Unite my heart to fear Your name” (Ps. 86:11). The instruments that were previously used for

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<sup>809</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Romans* 13 (NPNF I/11:429).

<sup>810</sup> Translators’ Note: i.e., of the body or the flesh.

iniquity become instruments of righteousness unto God. Your members become members of Christ (1 Cor. 6:15) and are holy.

**1229. Why do I not live a chaste life even though I am a believer and the Holy Spirit dwells in me?**

This is the Christian faith: we were “buried with Him by baptism into death ... knowing this, that our old man was crucified so that the body of sin might be abolished, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (Rom. 6:6). We have become the new, free human being; yet motions of the lust of the flesh continue to war against us, although we are not enslaved to them; for as **St. Augustine** says, our striving is founded on the work of grace. It is in the spirit that we can reject the motions of lust and prevent our members from obeying the lust of the flesh.

- a. **We reject the motions of lust** and do not consent to them when our will is good and, by the Holy Spirit, potent; even in the face of continuous attack by the motions of lust. We say with the apostle: “I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin” (Rom. 7:25). The apostle means that in the spirit, I desire what is good and serve the law of God; but the lustful motions of the flesh wage war in my members, though they do not enslave me.
- b. **The disobedience of our members to the lust of the flesh:** The lust of the flesh has been crucified since our old man has been crucified; yet, although crucified, these motions continue to wrestle with us. We strive by the Holy Spirit not to obey the members of our body, “for just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness ... so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness” (Rom. 6:19).

You died with Christ, and with your mind you rose with Him. Never cease your striving to take the Kingdom by force [cf. Matt. 11:12] by rejecting the thoughts and motions of evil and refusing to surrender your members to evil. After the apostle affirms that “our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin” (Rom. 6:6), he instructs us to “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin [do not consent to it], but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God” (Rom. 6:11–13).

Whoever dies with the Lord Jesus and rises with Him in his mind must not allow sin reign over him. This comes about through great effort and self-coercion, for “let him

who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Regarding this, the apostle tells us, “My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world” (1 John 2:1–2).

This is the concept of the life in Christ: unceasing endeavor by the power of grace towards a life of holiness, without falling into despair, but always hoping in the mercies of God, even amidst stumbles and falls. The apostle Paul says, “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16), and by this he warns us against the motions of lust against us, lest we fulfill them. Elsewhere, the apostle tells us, “For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col. 3:3); and then, he commands us, saying: “Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col. 3:5).

If we already “died” [verse 3], then why [in verse 5] does he say, “put to death your members”? Truly, anyone who dies with our Lord Jesus, and whose life is hidden with Christ in God, must not commit these evils of adultery, impurity, passion, etc.; even though the lustful motions of the body war against him without enslaving him so long as he remains on the path of unceasing repentance, rejects the motions of lust, and refuses to allow his members to be subject to them. He goes on to call to us: “but now, you yourselves are to put off all these ... since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:8–10).

Chastity is the work of God in your life. If God has granted you repentance, strive in submission to the Lord that you may not lose what you have received, but rather renew your new human being — which you received through baptism — to knowledge according to the image of his Creator.

### **1230. What practical steps can help one to overcome?**

- Know who you are. You are the focus of God’s love and His delight. He longs for your holiness (1 Thess. 4:3).
- Know also your weakness. You are in constant need of the work of the grace of God if you are to strive and overcome.
- Open the doors of your body and soul always to take from God and give to people.
- Realize that sin has no power over you, but that it was you who accepted its thoughts one day of your own free will.

- Bridle your body and rule it with fasting and vigils with prayer, knowing that your body is the property of the Lord.
- Take advantage of the means of grace. The door of repentance and confession is always open, and the Body and Blood of the Lord are offered to you, that you might abide in Him.
- Be chaste in all your senses, thoughts, and words, even in your stomach, and in all the earthly things.

Finally, remember, beloved one, that there is no crown without victory, no victory without war, and no war without an enemy. It is for us to fight and strive, to be victorious in the Lord, and to be crowned. Do not trust your body no matter what your past might be.

### **1231. What does St. Augustine say about chastity of heart?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Lest continence only from the lust of the inferior parts of the flesh seem to be hoped for from God as necessary, in the psalm there also is sung this: ‘Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth and a door of continence round about my lips’ (Ps. 141:4). Now, in this testimony of divine eloquence if we understand ‘mouth’ as we ought to understand it, the watch placed there is continence, inasmuch as we understand it as a gift of God. Surely, it is a slight matter to restrain the mouth of the body lest something that is not expedient come forth from it through the sound of the voice. Within is the mouth of the heart where he who said those words and directed us to say them desired that a guard and gate of continence be set for him by God.”<sup>811</sup>

### **1232. What is our attitude towards evil thoughts?**

**St. Augustine** says, “And so that he might more dearly indicate the interior mouth which he signified by those words when he said: ‘Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth, and a door of continence round about my lips,’ he immediately added: ‘Incline not my heart to evil words’ (Ps. 141:4). This inclination of the heart, what is it if not consent? For, he has not yet spoken who has not yet consented by an inclination of the heart to the onrushing suggestions in his heart of any aspect whatever. If, however, he consented, he has already spoken in his heart even though he has not made a sound with his mouth ... ‘For out of the heart,’ He says, ‘come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, immorality, thefts, false witnesses, blasphemies. There are the things that defile a man’ (Matt. 15:19–20).”<sup>812</sup>

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<sup>811</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 1.2 (FOTC 16:190).

<sup>812</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 2.3–4 (FOTC 16:190–192).

### **1233. Will our war against lust come to an end?**

**St. Augustine** says, “that perfection is not yet attained in which continence does not struggle with vice. But, now, as long as the ‘flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh’ (Gal. 5:17), it is sufficient for us not to consent to the evils which we feel within us. For, when that consent takes place, then there goes out from the mouth of the heart that which defiles a man. But when, through continence, the consent is not given, the evil of carnal concupiscence, against which a ‘concupiscence’ that is spiritual fights, is not allowed to do harm.”<sup>813</sup>

### **1234. What is the chastity of striving?**

**St. Augustine** says, “It is one thing to fight well, which is the case now when the struggle of death is resisted; and it is another thing not to have an adversary, which will be the case when death ‘our last enemy is destroyed’ (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26). Too, that continence itself, when it checks and restrains our passions, at the same time both seeks the good toward the immortality to which we are tending and spurns the evil with which in this present mortality we are contending. Truly, it is the lover and watcher of the former, but the enemy and witness against the latter; it seeks the noble, and shuns the ignoble. Continence would not by any means labor in the checking of desires if it freed us from nothing from which it were fitting to set us free, and if it gained nothing for our good in the fight with evil concupiscence. This the Apostle proclaims: ‘For I know,’ he says, ‘that in me, that is, in my flesh, no good dwells because to wish is within my power, but I do not find the strength to accomplish what is good’ (Rom. 7:18). Now, it is possible for a good to be performed where there is no yielding to evil concupiscence, but the good is completed or perfected, however, when evil concupiscence itself is no more. Again, in the same Epistle, the Doctor of the Gentiles proclaims: ‘For I am delighted with the law of God according to the inner man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind’ (Rom. 7:22–23).”<sup>814</sup>

### **1235. What is the role of the Law in revealing our lusts?**

**St. Augustine** says, “They do not experience this fight within themselves who are not defenders of the virtues and opponents of the vices, nor does anything drive out the evil of concupiscence except the good of continence. There are some who, utterly ignorant of the law of God, do not regard evil concupiscences as enemies, but, wretchedly blind in their slavery to them, even consider themselves as quite happy in sating them rather than quelling them. Indeed, by the Law they know them (‘For through law comes the recognition of sin’ (Rom. 3:20), and ‘I had not known lust,’ he said, ‘unless the law had said, “You shall not lust”’ (Rom. 7:7)) and they are overcome by their attack, because they live subject to the Law

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<sup>813</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 2.5 (FOTC 16:194–195).

<sup>814</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 3.6 (FOTC 16:195–196).

by which what is good is ordered and not given. They do not live subject to grace, which gives through the Holy Spirit that which is ordered by the Law. The Law, therefore, entered into these, ‘that sin might abound’ (cf. Rom. 5:20) in their case. The prohibition increased the concupiscence and rendered it unconquered, that transgression also might be added, which did not exist without the Law, although there was sin. ‘For where there is no law, neither is there transgression’ (Rom. 4:15), Thus when the law prohibits sin, there being no help of grace, it becomes in addition even the strength of the sin committed, whence the Apostle says: ‘And the power of sin is the law’ (1 Cor. 15:56). And it is not to be wondered at that human infirmity has added the strength even from a good law to evil, since for the making of that very law it trusted in its own strength.’<sup>815</sup>

### 1236. What is the role of grace in our striving?

**St. Augustine** says, “This, therefore, is now going on for as long as this mortal life of ours subject to grace endures, lest sin, that is, the concupiscence of sin (for in this place he calls this by the name of sin) reign in our mortal body. That is shown to reign, however, when its desires are obeyed. There is, then, a concupiscence of sin within us which must not be permitted to reign; there are its desires which must not be obeyed, or it will reign over those who obey them. Therefore, let not concupiscence usurp for itself our members, but let continence claim them for itself that they might be the instruments of the justice of God, and that they might not be instruments of iniquity unto sin; for, thus sin will not have dominion over us. We are not under the law, which indeed commands the good but does not grant it, but we are under grace, which in making us love what the Law commands can command us as free agents.”<sup>816</sup>

### 1237. How do we understand the concept of “living after the flesh”?

**St. Augustine** says, “That we might not fall from continence, we ought to be especially vigilant against the treachery of diabolical suggestions to presume in our own strength. ‘For cursed be the one that trusts in man’ (Jer. 17:5). And who is that one but man? For, he cannot truthfully say that he does not put his trust in man who puts it in himself. And this, also, to live according to man, what is it except to live according to the flesh? Let him who is tempted by such a suggestion therefore, listen, and if there is in him any Christian feeling, let him

<sup>815</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 3.7 (FOTC 16:196) amended. Many people fall into this deception. For example, when a young man falls in love with a young lady and becomes emotionally attached to her, he may find that the temptation to gaze lustfully no longer assails him, nor do impure thoughts preoccupy him. Finding himself in this state, he considers himself to have become saintly, not realizing that the lusts within him are merely resting from their corruption since there is currently no need for them to rise up and rebel within him because they are in fact effectively possessing and ruling him under the guise of what looks like holiness. The opposite also occurs when a person breaks off a relationship. The war of thoughts rekindles, and lustful gazes towards her and towards others increase, for the lust of the flesh opposes the desire of the spirit to be chaste.

<sup>816</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 3.8 (FOTC 16:197–198).

tremble; let him hear this, I say: ‘If you live according to the flesh, you shall die’ (Rom. 8:13).”<sup>817</sup>

**1238. Why does it say, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14)?**

**St. Augustine** says, “When, however, you hear: ‘Sin shall have no dominion over you,’ do not trust in yourself in order that sin may not dominate you, but trust in Him to whom that holy one was praying when he said: ‘Direct my steps according to your word, and let no iniquity have dominion over me’ (Ps. 118:133 LXX). Lest, perhaps, when we have heard: ‘Sin shall not have dominion over you,’ we should exalt ourselves and attribute this to our own strength, the Apostle saw this and added at once: ‘Since you are not under the law, but under grace’ (Rom. 6:14). Grace therefore causes sin not to have power over you. Do not, then, trust in yourself, lest thereby it have much more dominion over you. And when we hear: ‘If by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the flesh, you shall live’ (Rom. 8:13), let us not attribute this good to our spirit alone, as if through itself it could do these things. For, lest we get a relish for that carnal feeling, our spirit being dead rather than a death-dealing one, he straightway added: ‘For whoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God’ (Rom. 8:14). So, when by our spirit we put to death the works of the flesh, we are impelled by the Spirit of God, which grants the continence by which we restrain, master, and overcome concupiscence.”<sup>818</sup>

**1239. What are some of the false excuses we use to justify giving in to our desires?**

- a. **That we are fated or destined to commit sin.** But this means feigning ignorance of the potential that God has granted us, whereas the psalmist says, “Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it” (Ps. 34:14).
- b. **We blame Satan, or his hidden suggestions.** And yet, we cannot shift the blame this way, for it is we who have accepted these suggestions, whatever their source may be.
- c. The Manicheans taught that sin results whenever the **evil nature of the body overcomes the nature of the spirit created by God.** We do indeed find both of these natures combined in us, and they do indeed at times strive against each other; so let us pray and strive that they may both come into harmony with each other by the work of the Holy Spirit in both. We ought not consider either of them as an enemy, for our enemy is *sin* that makes the body lust against the spirit. But if the body is healed it will err no longer, and the conflict between them will cease, and the body will become

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<sup>817</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 4.10 (FOTC 16:200) amended.

<sup>818</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Continence* 5.12 (FOTC 16:202–203).



beloved and worthy of our care, as the apostle said: “For no one ever hated his own flesh” (Eph. 5:29).

**1240. Is the body inherently evil as the Manicheans taught?**

The apostle commands men to love their wives as they love their bodies, and as Christ loves the Church (Eph. 5:29). Thus, the apostle teaches us three unities:

*Unity of Christ and the Church.*

*Unity of husband and wife.*

*Unity of spirit and body.*

In these unities, the first party offers good counsel to the second, and the second desires this counsel from the first and is guided by it. Note the great value of both parties, even if the first party is over the second, and the second party is duly subordinate.

**1241. What should we ask of God, that we may experience purity and chastity?**

**St. Aphraphat** the Persian sage invites us to pursue that which is conceived in our thoughts — purity of heart — and gives birth to chastity. He says, “First of all, the offering of Abel was accepted indeed before God through his purity of heart, and that of Cain was rejected (Gen. 4:3–5). And how was the matter known to us that the offering of Abel was accepted and that of Cain was rejected? And [how] did Abel understand that his offering was accepted and also again how did Cain know that his had been rejected? I will convince you about this as much as I can. But my beloved, you know that if an offering was acceptable before God, [then] it was distinguished by the fact that fire would descend from heaven and the offering was consumed by it. For when Abel and Cain offered their offerings together, living fire that was ministering before God (Ps. 104:4) came down and licked up the pure offering of Abel, and [since] that of Cain was impure it did not touch it. From there Abel understood that his offering was accepted, on the other hand Cain also realized that his was rejected. The fruits of Cain's heart demonstrated and witnessed about him that he was full of treachery when he killed his brother (Gen. 4:8). For to what his mind conceived, his hands gave birth. And the purity of the heart of Abel is his prayer.”<sup>819</sup>

**1242. How should we deal with thoughts that creep into our minds?**

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “The appearance of a thought is, in itself, neither evil nor good, but rather a test of our free will. Whoever adheres to the commandment will be rewarded with the crown (of victory) as a reward for his faith. Whoever tends to laxity is

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<sup>819</sup> St. Aphraphat, *Aphrahat: Demonstrations I*, trans., Kuriakose Valavan (St Ephrem Ecumenical Research Institute, 2005) Demonstration 4: pp. 77–78.

reveals himself as deserving of judgment as the reward for his unbelief. However, you must know that we are not judged immediately for every action, whether it makes us appear to be doing well or worthy of rebuke. Rather, only when we have completed our whole life — during which we are tempted in our thoughts, being at times victorious and at other times defeated, falling and rising, losing our way and returning to it — ... All of this together is what we are held accountable for when we leave this life, and accordingly are we either judged or justified.”



## 5

### Vices or Evils

#### 1243. What does ‘vice’ mean?

If Christian virtues are the fruit of the work of the Holy Trinity in the life of the believer, offered to him as a promise of heaven; then vices, conversely, are the fruit of the denial and rejection of divine grace, whereby a person deprives himself of communion with God and imagines that the virtues are merely the practice of moral conduct, thus making the virtuous life nothing more than a flashy outward façade.

#### 1244. How are virtues and vices related to each other?

This question appears in the Paradise of the Fathers: “An old man was asked, ‘How does a monk acquire virtue?’ He replied, ‘If anyone wants to acquire virtue, if he does not hate the vice that opposes it, then he cannot acquire it. If you wish to bewail, detest laughter; if you want to be humble, detest arrogance; and if you wish to control your inclinations, detest evil and do not distort matters. And whoever wants to be ascetic must detest the love of silver; whoever wants to live in the wilderness must detest the cities; whoever craves tranquility must cease to guide others; whoever wants to be estranged from his habits must not mix (with other people); whoever wishes to control his anger must relinquish his will; and whoever wishes to control his belly must relinquish the pleasures and company of worldly people. He who desires not to harbor resentment must hate [seeking out] defects; and those who cannot bear the burden of responsibilities must live in solitude. Whoever wishes to control his tongue must block his ears so as not to hear much. And whoever desires to attain to the fear of God must detest the comforts of the flesh, but rather love tribulation and sorrow. With these qualities, you can worship God sincerely.’”

#### 1245. How should the believer understand the presence of evil?

The almighty God did not create evil. Rather, what happened to us was the consequence of the entry of sin into human life. God, in His love for us, supports us and turns evil into the mystery of sanctification, blessing, and an eternal crown for us.

#### 1246. Why do evil people reject divine will?

By divine grace, the person about to be baptized or their sponsor proclaims the new birth, but the unbeliever cherishes being a child of the devil. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “And not only stocks and stones, but even Satan himself, the destroyer of souls, have some ere now chosen for a father; to whom the Lord said as a rebuke, ‘You do the deeds of your father’ (John 8:41, 44), that is of the devil, he being the father of men not by nature, but by fraud.

For like as Paul by his godly teaching came to be called the father of the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15), so the devil is called the father of those who of their own will consent unto him. For we shall not tolerate those who give a wrong meaning to that saying, ‘Hereby know we the children of God, and the children of the devil’ (1 John 3:10), as if there were by nature some men to be saved, and some to be lost. Whereas we come into such holy sonship not of necessity but by choice: nor was the traitor Judas by nature a son of the devil and of perdition; for certainly he would never have cast out devils at all in the name of Christ, ‘for Satan does not cast out Satan’ (Mark 3:23). Nor on the other hand would Paul have turned from persecuting to preaching. But the adoption is in our own power, as John says, ‘But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to them that believe in His name’ (John 1:12). For not before their believing, but from their believing they were counted worthy to become of their own choice the children of God.’<sup>820</sup>

**1247. If different people obviously have different personalities, why do we lay the blame on the will?**

By living faith, our characters are sanctified despite their diversity. A clear example in the New Testament is how the character of Peter the quick-tempered apostle differs from that of the calm John the Beloved. When they are both sanctified, each feels that the other completes him, and it comes as no surprise that they go on to serve together in harmony. We read of many instances in which they went out with each other in the company of the Lord Christ (Matt. 17:1; Mark 5:37; 13:3; 14:33; Luke 8:51; 22:8) and worked together (Acts 3:1, 3, 4, 11, 13), and the apostles sent them out together to Samaria (Acts 8:14).

The evil that a person himself chooses is the product of the will, and our free will in committing sin is clearly evident in the words of the prophet: “Yet I have planted you a noble vine, a seed of highest quality. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate plant of an alien vine?” (Jer. 2:21). The seed was good, yet the fruit was bad; so the sower is blameless, but the tree is burned with fire because although it was well sown, it willingly bore bad fruit. As the preacher says, “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (Eccles. 7:29). Further, the apostle says, “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Eph. 2:10).

The Creator is good and He created us for good deeds, but the creation has fallen into evil by its own free will. **St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Sin then is, as we have said, a fearful evil, but not incurable; fearful for him who clings to it, but easy of cure for him who by repentance puts it from him. For suppose that a man is holding fire in his hand; as long as he holds fast the live coal he is sure to be burned, but should he put away the coal, he would have cast away the flame also with it. If however any one thinks that he is not being burned when sinning, to him the Scripture says, *Shall a man wrap up fire in his bosom, and not burn*

<sup>820</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 7.13 (NPNF II/7:47) amended.

*his clothes?* (Prov. 6:27). For sin burns the sinews of the soul, and breaks the spiritual bones of the mind, and darkens the light of the heart.”<sup>821</sup>

#### **1248. Does the deceitful devil have binding authority over humanity?**

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Yet you are not the sole author of the evil, but there is also another most wicked prompter, the devil. He indeed suggests, but does not get the mastery by force over those who do not consent. Therefore the Preacher says, *If the spirit of him who has power rise up against you, quit not your place* (Eccles. 10:4). Shut your door, and put him far from you, and he shall not hurt you. But if you indifferently admit the thought of lust, it takes root in you by its suggestions, and enthralls your mind, and drags you down into a pit of evils. But perhaps you say, I am a believer, and lust does not gain the ascendant over me, even if I think upon it frequently. Do you not know that a root breaks even a rock by long persistence? Admit not the seed, since it will rend your faith asunder: tear out the evil by the root before it blossom, lest from being careless at the beginning you have afterwards to seek for axes and fire. When your eyes begin to be diseased, get them cured in good time, lest you become blind, and then have to seek the physician.”<sup>822</sup>

#### **1249. Do we find lists of vices in the writings of the early Church?**

In addition to vices mentioned in the Holy Bible, there is a list of vices in *The Didache*,<sup>823</sup> which likely dates from the end of the first century or the beginning of the second century.

**St. Evagrius Ponticus** compiled his famous list of eight vices:<sup>824</sup> gluttony, lust, greed, sadness, anger, despondency (*acedia*), vainglory, and pride. These can be divided into three groups:

**First:** Vices related to material things, namely gluttony, carnal lust, and avarice or greed.

**Second:** Vices that concern the intrinsic personality, namely sadness or depression, anger, and listlessness or despondency.

**Third:** Vices that concern reliance on the ego, namely vainglory and pride.

The first group arises from the misuse of instinctive lusts, where a person does not control his eating, drinking, bodily lust, or love of money.

The second group arises from a lack of control of the movements of one’s emotions.

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<sup>821</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 2.1 (NPNF II/7:8) amended.

<sup>822</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 2.3 (NPNF II/7:8) amended.

<sup>823</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 5: p. 193.

<sup>824</sup> *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus* (Oxford Early Christian Studies), trans., Robert E. Sinkewicz., ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford University Press, 2003): pp. 60–64, 74–90.

The third group arises from reliance on the ego, which makes one fall prey to seeking vainglory, and pride or haughtiness.

Evagrius' disciple, **St. John Cassian**, adopts the same concept but with a slight difference in the order of the vices that highlights the relationship between sadness and despondency. Thus, he lists anger after greed.<sup>825</sup>

**Pope Gregory the Great** singles out pride as the mother of all other vices and therefore removes it from the list, omits sadness by subsuming it under despondency, and adds envy to the list of vices. Thus, he produced the list of the "Seven Deadly Sins,"<sup>826</sup> which are closely associated with the West in the Middle Ages. These are:

- a. Vainglory.
- b. Envy.
- c. Anger.
- d. Dejection.
- e. Avarice.
- f. Gluttony.
- g. Lust.

**St. John Climacus**, does not insist on any particular classification, holding that by nature, sin knows no order, and therefore cannot be precisely classified. He mentions seven vices, but does not include envy.<sup>827</sup>

- a. Gluttony.
- b. Lust.
- c. Greed.
- d. Sadness.
- e. Anger.
- f. Vainglory
- g. Pride.

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<sup>825</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 5.2 (NPNF II/11:339).

<sup>826</sup> Gregory the Great, *Morals on the Book of Job in Three Volumes* 31.87–91 (LFHCC 31:489–493).

<sup>827</sup> St. John Climacus: *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans., Colm Luibheid and Norman Russell (Paulist Press, 1982) 8–17: p. 146–193.

We can compare the lists of vices in the writings of Saints Evagrius, John Cassian, and John Climacus:

| St. Evagrius | St. John Climacus                | St. John Cassian                     |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
|              | Anger                            |                                      |
|              | Sadness                          |                                      |
| Gluttony     | Gluttony                         | Gluttony                             |
| Lust         | Lust                             | Fornication                          |
| Greed        | Greed                            | Stinginess<br>or love of money       |
| Anger        |                                  | Anger                                |
| Despair      |                                  | Sadness or misery                    |
| Vainglory    | Vainglory                        | Lethargy or listlessness<br>(acedia) |
| Pride        | Pride                            | Love of being noticed                |
|              | He adds:<br>Resentment or malice | Pride                                |
|              | Slander or Calumny               |                                      |
|              | Talkativeness                    |                                      |
|              | Lying                            |                                      |

**1250. What are the types and manner of the vices according to St. John Cassian (or Abba Serapion)?**

He divides the vices into two types: physical sins and spiritual sins.



As for the manner of sin or vice in us, there are four forms:

- a. Some cannot be not committed without the body being involved; such as gluttony and adultery.
- b. Some are committed without the body being involved at all; such as the love of being noticed and pride.
- c. Some have external motives; such as avarice and anger.
- d. Some arise from internal emotions; such as listlessness and sadness.

This topic is found in St. John Cassian's fifth Conference. Here **Abba Serapion** says, "And to make this clearer not only by a short discussion to the best of my ability, but by Scripture proof as well, gluttony and fornication, though they exist in us naturally (for sometimes they spring up without any incitement from the mind, and simply at the motion and allurements of the flesh) yet if they are to be consummated, must find an external object, and thus take effect only through bodily acts. For 'every man is tempted of his own lust. Then lust when it has conceived bears sin, and sin when it is consummated begets death' (James 1:14–15). For the first Adam could not have fallen a victim to gluttony unless he had had material food at hand, and had used it wrongly, nor could the second Adam be tempted without the enticement of some object, when it was said to Him: 'If You are the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread' (Matt. 4:3). And it is clear to everybody that fornication also is only completed by a bodily act, as God says of this spirit to the blessed Job: 'And his force is in his loins, and his strength in the navel of his belly' (Job 40:16). And so these two faults in particular, which are carried into effect by the aid of the flesh, especially require bodily abstinence as well as spiritual care of the soul; since the determination of the mind is not in itself enough to resist their attacks (as is sometimes the case with anger or gloominess or the other passions, which an effort of the mind alone can overcome without any mortification of the flesh), but bodily chastisement must be used as well, and be carried out by means of fasting and vigils and acts of contrition; and to this must be added change of scene, because since these sins are the results of faults of both mind and body, so they can only be overcome by the united efforts of both. And although the blessed Apostle says generally that all faults are carnal, since he enumerates enmities and anger and heresies among other works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19), yet in order to cure them and to discover their nature more exactly we make a twofold division of them: for we call some of them carnal, and some spiritual. And those we call carnal, which specially have to do with pampering the appetites of the flesh, and with which it is so charmed and satisfied, that sometimes it excites the mind when at rest and even drags it against its will to consent to its desire. Of which the blessed Apostle says: 'In which also we all walked in time past in the desires of our flesh, fulfilling the will of the flesh and of our thoughts, and were by nature children of wrath even as the rest' (Eph. 2:3). But we call those spiritual which spring only from the impulse of the mind and not merely contribute no pleasure to the flesh, but actually bring on it a weakness that is harmful to it, and only feed a diseased mind with the food of a most miserable pleasure.

And therefore these need a single medicine for the heart: but those which are carnal can only be cured, as we said, by a double remedy.”<sup>828</sup>

“... so both the former and the latter are spoken of as Adam; the one being the first for destruction and death, and the other the first for resurrection and life. Through the one the whole race of mankind is brought into condemnation, through the other the whole race of mankind is set free ... Lastly the devil only tempted Him to those sins, by which he had deceived the first Adam, inferring that He as man would similarly be deceived in other matters if he found that He was overcome by those temptations by which he had overthrown His predecessor ... because after His victory over gluttony, he did not venture to tempt Him to fornication, but passed on to covetousness, which he knew to be the root of all evils (1 Tim. 6:10) and when again vanquished in this, he did not dare attack Him with any of those sins which follow, which, as he knew full well, spring from this as a root and source; and so he passed on to the last passion; pride, by which he knew that those who are perfect and have overcome all other sins, can be affected, and owing to which he remembered that he himself in his character of Lucifer, and many others too, had fallen from their heavenly estate, without temptation from any of the preceding passions. In this order then which we have mentioned, which is the one given by the evangelist Luke, there is an exact agreement between the allurements and forms of the temptations by which that most crafty foe attacked both the first and the second Adam.”<sup>829</sup>

### **1251. Are the vices connected to each other?**

In the fifth Conference we also read: “Of these eight faults then, although they are different in their origin and in their way of affecting us, yet the six former; gluttony, fornication, covetousness, anger, dejection, accidie, have a sort of connexion with each other, and are, so to speak, linked together in a chain, so that any excess of the one forms a starting point for the next. For from superfluity of gluttony fornication is sure to spring, and from fornication covetousness, from covetousness anger, from anger, dejection, and from dejection, accidie. And so we must fight against them in the same way, and with the same methods: and having overcome one, we ought always to enter the lists against the next. For a tall and spreading tree of a noxious kind will the more easily be made to wither if the roots on which it depends have first been laid bare or cut; and a pond of water which is dangerous will be dried up at once if the spring and flowing channel which produce it are carefully stopped up. Wherefore in order to overcome accidie, you must first get the better of dejection: in order to get rid of dejection, anger must first be expelled: in order to quell anger, covetousness must be trampled under foot: in order to root out covetousness, fornication must be checked: and in order to destroy fornication, you must chastise the sin of gluttony. But the two remaining faults; vainglory and pride, are connected together in a somewhat similar way

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<sup>828</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 5.4 (NPNF II/11:340) amended.

<sup>829</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 5.6 (NPNF II/11:341–342).

as the others of which we have spoken ... into these two we are in danger of falling when we have proved victorious, and above all after some splendid triumph.”<sup>830</sup>

### 1252. Does the enemy of good attack all people in the same way?

In the fifth Conference we also read: “Although then these eight faults trouble all sorts of men, yet they do not attack them all in the same way. For in one man the spirit of fornication holds the chief place: wrath rides rough shod over another: over another vainglory claims dominion: in another pride holds the field: and though it is clear that we are all attacked by all of them, yet the difficulties come to each of us in very different ways and manners.”<sup>831</sup>

### 1253. To what extent is it helpful to identify the particular vice attacking us?

In Cassian’s Conferences, **Abba Sarapion** says, “Wherefore we must enter the lists against these faults in such a way that every one should discover his besetting sin, and direct his main attack against it, directing all his care and watchfulness of mind to guard against its assault, directing against it daily the weapons of fasting, and at all times hurling against it the constant darts of sighs and groanings from the heart, and employing against it the labours of vigils and the meditation of the heart, and further pouring forth to God constant tears and prayers and continually and expressly praying to be delivered from its attack ... as is generally the case with those who are wont to face all kinds of wild beasts in the presence of the kings of this world, out of consideration for the rewards—a kind of spectacle which is generally called *pancarpus*.<sup>832</sup> Such men, I say, direct their first assault against whatever beasts they see to be the strongest and fiercest, and when they have despatched these, then they can more easily lay low the remaining ones, which are not so terrible and powerful ... Nor need we imagine that if any one grapples with *one* fault in particular, and seems too careless about guarding against the attacks of others, he will be easily wounded by a sudden assault, for this cannot possibly happen<sup>833</sup> ... For the giver of the law himself teaches us that we ought to follow this plan in our conflicts and not to trust in our own power; as he says: ‘You shall not fear them because the Lord your God is in the midst of you, a God mighty and terrible: He will consume these nations in your sight by little and little and by degrees. You will not be able to destroy them altogether: lest perhaps the beasts of the earth should increase upon you. But the Lord your God shall deliver them in your sight; and shall slay them until they be utterly destroyed’ (Deut. 7:21–23).”<sup>834</sup>

<sup>830</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 5.10 (NPNF II/11:343).

<sup>831</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 5.13 (NPNF II/11:345).

<sup>832</sup> *Pancarpus* (πάγκαρπος). The word originally applied to an offering of all kinds of fruit.

<sup>833</sup> He speaks here of greed and anger which can be so easily overcome that thousands left their possessions and dwelt the wilderness; and also of sadness and listlessness, which can appear in the absence of any external influence, and as such, often attack hermits.

<sup>834</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 5.14 (NPNF II/11:345) amended.

**1254. How can we summarize the principles in St. Sarapion's exhortation regarding vices in St. John Cassian's Conference with him?**

- The sins of the flesh are those in which the body seeks to satisfy itself or find pleasure. Victory over them requires the combination of bodily efforts (fasting, abstinence, and vigils) with efforts of the mind (prayers and groanings); all in the hands of divine grace.
- The sins follow a sequence, with each sin leading to another. It is necessary to attack them at the source.
- Every person is beset more by a characteristic sin, and every person must target his 'arrows' on that sin; which are fasting, prayer, groanings, and tears. Victory over this sin requires that one attend to one's other sins as well.
- The Lord was tempted and He triumphed, so that we may know that we are not victorious by our own efforts, but through the triumphant Lord Jesus.
- Victory requires a life of thanksgiving to God, because there is no salvation for us from sin without the grace and care of God and His protection over us.



## 6

### **Christian Faith and Human Culture**

#### **1255. In what way was the early Church engaged with the society around it?**

Although the Church does not interfere in political matters, or in civil, military, or economic government, or in social organizations; she nonetheless feels a real motherhood towards every person, every family, and indeed, all of society. She yearns to transform the world into a heaven where there is rejoicing and no one suffers need; for she cannot bear to see anyone being oppressed or in pain. The Church aspires to see every person in the world characterized by self-confidence in the Lord and playing their vital role in humanity, bearing within an earnest yet humble spirit of leadership, free of apathy or feelings of inferiority.

The social principles of the early Church stem not from dry research or purely rational arguments, but from a living appreciation of human thought and regard for human cultures, and a desire that these may be sanctified and brought into living communion with God, the lover of all humanity. Every member of the Church yearns to see the whole world become a new joyful heaven lacking in nothing, and with no place for social injustice, intellectual ignorance, selfishness, or lust for power. The principles of Christian social life include living a life in the Church according to the Gospel that engages the deepest aspects of the mind, heart, and senses, and is translated into one's daily behavior and interactions.

#### **1256. What are the characteristics of the social principles of the Holy Bible?**

The Old Testament is concerned with nothing so much as with justice and righteousness. Justice in the Law concerns human dealings with God and other people, with animals and birds, and even with inanimate objects. There are detailed commandments given to humanity at the beginning of their spiritual life to be a law for them, from which they ought not turn to the left nor to the right. Without these commandments, their sacrifices, prayers, fasts, gifts, and all their worship was not acceptable. When the prophets speak of the corruption that has befallen humanity and how to fight it and repent from it, they speak of liberation from oppression and violence, and of care for the needy, the weak, and those who have no one to remember them. For the prophets, this liberation through repentance was a prerequisite for pure worship.

In the New Testament, we do not find detailed laws expressing social principles, but God deals with the believer as a mature person. He grants him a vibrant mind and a pure inner life, out of which he can offer service to society according to the needs of the time in a spirit of practical and realistic faith. Hence, in the writings of the early Fathers from the Apostolic era onwards, we observe the development of social services, but on the basis of a clear and unchanging faith. This mindset is both vivid and stable and, therefore, capable of adapting to changing needs over time.

It is difficult to define the social principles of the early Church in isolation from spiritual, cultural, or other principles. Indeed, these were harmonized in a single holistic approach and lived experience. The writings of the early Church reveal this unity in life — there is no separation of the hidden personal spiritual life from the communal life of the Church, fueled by the Spirit. There is no separation of the Christian’s relationship with God from the relationship with fellow human beings in general, and the faithful in particular. There is no separation of spiritual growth from the pursuit of academic growth; nor separation of the sanctification of the soul from that of the mind, nor indeed, of the body, senses, and emotions. Therefore, when we attempt to define the social principles held by the Fathers of the early Church we cannot isolate them from all the other aspects of life as a whole.

**1257. What approach did the early Church take, as exemplified by the trilogy of St. Clement of Alexandria?**

**St. Clement of Alexandria** is known for his famous trilogy: *Protrepticus*, *Paedagogus*, and *Stromata*. This trilogy illustrates the teaching program of the first Catechetical School of Alexandria. As Osborn says, “The problem of the relation between the three major works has attracted considerable attention during the last fifty years.”<sup>835</sup> And Swete says, “Perhaps nothing in the whole range of early patristic literature is more stimulating to the modern reader than this great trilogy of graduated instruction in the Christian life ... Clement’s conception of Christianity, in its relation to the whole field of human thought, is one which has an especial value for our own times and promises to be increasingly useful in the present century.”<sup>836</sup>

For St. Clement, God’s plan for humanity consists of three stages that correspond to these three books:<sup>837</sup>

**First:** The Logos, the “Word of God,” calls humanity to salvation and away from the clutches of paganism through faith. This corresponds to his first book, *Protrepticus* or *Exhortation to the Greeks*. And as **Eusebius** says, “It was indeed fitting for Clement to expose the vileness of paganism, for he himself passed through it but escaped its plague.”

**Second:** Human life is reformed through moral commandments. This stage corresponds to the book *Paedagogus* or *The Instructor*, which deals with many moral commandments, the goal of which is “to become like God the Word or the divine Teacher Himself.”

<sup>835</sup> E. F. Osborn, *The Philosophy of Clement of Alexandria* (Cambridge University Press, 1957): p. 5.

<sup>836</sup> H. B. Swete, *Patristic Study* (London: Longmans, Green, 1902): p. 48.

<sup>837</sup> Cf. A. Neander, *General History of the Christian Religion and Church, Vol. 2* (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1871): p. 455.

**Third:** In his book *Stromata* or *The Miscellanies* humanity rises to the full knowledge of the divine and the state of Christian *gnosis*.<sup>838</sup>

This trilogy offers advice and counsel, training and strengthening, and finally healing and education. As Jay says, “In his trilogy, he endeavors to show that the Word of God (the Logos), who brought enlightenment to ancient Israel and to the Greek philosophers, has now, in Jesus Christ, come in a new way to bring the saving knowledge of God to all men. He pleads with his readers to take Christ as their tutor. He will first exhort them. Then, after their conversion, he will train them with a salutary discipline, and lead them from the first rudiments of discipleship, through fear to hope, on to disinterested love and to knowledge which is now desired for its own sake, the knowledge of God.”<sup>839</sup> And in the words of the saint himself: “Eagerly desiring, then, to perfect us by a gradation conducive to salvation, suited for efficacious discipline, a beautiful arrangement is observed by the all-benignant Word, who first exhorts, then trains, and finally teaches.”<sup>840</sup>

The writings of St. Clement of Alexandria illustrate the early Church’s diligence, from the earliest times, in addressing every aspect of human life — whether deliverance from the corruption of paganism, enjoyment of fellowship in daily new life as an icon of the divine Teacher, or enjoyment of growth in the knowledge of divine mysteries. Life is a unified whole, and there is no separation between doctrine, worship, behavior, learning, and knowledge. Therefore, we cannot isolate the Church’s social thinking from all other aspects of life.

### **1258. What is the Christian faith’s perspective on the many different human cultures?**

The essence of the whole Christian faith is that God is not isolated in heaven, creating the world and setting in motion, then leaving it to the laws He set for it, as Aristotle thought. Rather, God is the Lover of humanity. Humanity occupies a special place in His heart, so to speak. The prophet says, “The Lord your God in your midst, the Mighty One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph. 3:17). He is like a mother who embraces her only child and expresses her joy through jubilation and song.

The incarnation of the Word of God and His dwelling in our world, becoming one of us, sanctified our lands, deeds, minds, emotions, talents, and capabilities. It is not surprising that His appearance was followed by rapid development and progress. Monasteries became centers of learning populated by clergy who were scholars intent on making constant progress

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<sup>838</sup> Translators’ Note: The Greek word *gnosis* means ‘knowledge.’ In his writings, Clement pointed out the errors of the contemporary movement called *Gnosticism* which claimed for its members unique and esoteric knowledge. True knowledge or *gnosis*, he said, can only be found in Christianity, and the only true *gnostic* (or knower) is the true Christian.

<sup>839</sup> E. G. Jay, *The Church: Its changing image through twenty centuries, Vol. 1* (London: SPCK, 1977): p. 59.

<sup>840</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.1 (ANF 2:209).



without expecting anything in return. Our Messiah came to sanctify the mind as well as the emotions. Humanity did not cease its diligent research, even invading the realm of space, and making rapid advances in technology. Such progress will continue, for the Word of God Himself came down to sanctify and nurture the fullness of human life and thought.

Now, extremely briefly, we will present a living portrait of the early Church's views on social life. Even if there is a tiny narrow-minded minority who adopt an attitude of opposition to society, the Church lives out the Gospel mindset and therefore never ceases to support the world in what is true and edifying.

### **1259. What is the Christian faith's perspective on the human mind?**

The scholar **Origen**, the dean of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, discusses the role of the mind in the life of the believer: "as the eye naturally seeks the light and vision, and our body naturally desires food and drink, so our mind is possessed with a becoming and natural desire to become acquainted with the truth of God and the causes of things. Now we have received this desire from God."<sup>841</sup>

The Lord Christ came to offer salvation to the world and to raise the faithful to eternal heavenly glory. He was not associated with any school of philosophy or learning, but presented a new perspective to humanity, honoring us above all the world. He sanctified all things for humanity, that we might labor in the spirit of strength and progress and live our best possible life. Thus, He impelled humanity to value progress, learning, and knowledge. And His Church impels the world, directly or indirectly, towards progress.

The Lord Christ did not Himself engage in philosophical dialogues ('science' was part of philosophy) but opened the way for everyone to study and learn. For example, Aristotelians held that a person could not be happy if he was poor, without fame, sick, or a slave and his society viewed education as the unique privilege of free, wealthy, and powerful people. But the Church came to proclaim that there is neither slave nor free in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28), ascribing blessedness to the poor, the grieving, and the afflicted. The Christian faith is an invitation to the whole world to seek knowledge; indeed, to be molded and renewed by the Spirit of God who is for everyone without partiality, so that we might become the image of our Creator. Thus, Christian teaching was available to everyone so that the believer might experience the new life offered in the Lord and enjoy a living experience every day in his relationship with his Creator and Savior. The door of education is open to all, as **Origen** says, and every bishopric became a school.

Education took the preeminent place in the life of the early Church, together with faith, as we see in many of the writings of the Church Fathers, especially those of **St. Clement of Alexandria**. The title of his famous work, the *Paedagogus*, which means *The Instructor*,

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<sup>841</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.11.4 (ANF 4:298).

refers to the Lord Christ, who educates and trains His pupils to become an icon of Him. In his view, the Church is the school and the Teacher is the Lord Christ who takes care of us and instructs our souls. He explains: “it is time for us in due course to say who our Instructor is. He is called Jesus. Sometimes He calls Himself a shepherd, and says, ‘I am the good Shepherd’ (John 10:11) ... The Word, then, who leads the children to salvation, is appropriately called the Instructor [Paedagogus] ... Now piety is instruction, being the learning of the service of God, and training in the knowledge of the truth, and right guidance which leads to heaven,”<sup>842</sup> and “the Word, from whom we learn frugality and humility, and all that pertains to love of truth, love of man, and love of excellence ... so is there a generous disposition, suitable to the choice that is set upon moral loveliness, resulting from the training of Christ.”<sup>843</sup>

### **1260. How did the Church pave the way for the world to open the doors of education to all?**

**First: By opening her doors to education and service to everyone.** Many Christian authors defended the sanctity of human freedom. **Origen** says, “If souls are actuated by freedom of will, and maintain either their advance or retrogression according to the power of their will.”<sup>844</sup> He also says, “there is a blameworthy kind of freedom and a praiseworthy kind of servitude. For it is a reproach to be free of righteousness; but to be its slave is praiseworthy. Now when he speaks of someone becoming a slave of righteousness, understand that it is, at the same time, of wisdom, piety, chastity, and all the virtues together.”<sup>845</sup> He espouses freedom that is responsible and sober, and as the apostle Paul says, “Only don’t use your liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another” (Gal. 5:13). For love lived out towards our brothers and sisters lends sweetness even to servitude, service, acceptance of others, and advancing others in honor. Of this servitude, he says, “For though I was free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more” (1 Cor. 9:19).

**Second: By disseminating the spirit of inner joy that is a foundation for learning.** Study, research, and innovation require a well-balanced soul that is not easily susceptible to despair and anxiety, nor constantly hindered by the burden of worry that undermines human insight. For if a person sees everything from a gloomy outlook, he will lose his vitality, ability, and talent. The Fathers espoused the life of joy and praise, for the world was in need of the experience of heavenly joy. The Lord Christ came to spread the spirit of inner joy among His believers.

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<sup>842</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.7 (ANF 2:222–223).

<sup>843</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.12 (ANF 2:235).

<sup>844</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.3.4 (ANF 4:272).

<sup>845</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10* 6.5.3 (FOTC 104:12–13).

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “[Let us] take on the impress of the truly saving life of our Savior; and meditating on the heavenly mode of life according to which we have been deified, let us anoint ourselves with the perennial immortal bloom of gladness—that ointment of sweet fragrance.”<sup>846</sup>

**Third: By elevating the human psyche and esteeming its abilities in the Lord.** Humanity needs someone to raise our souls to see that the truth is within our reach. Indeed, Truth Himself came to our very land and home, and even our hearts, that through truth, we might labor to attain knowledge, both in this world and in the world to come. This desire for knowledge and learning never ceases, but rather continues to burn within us, pouring out upon us an everlasting inner joy. Each of us labors according to his gifts and within the limits appropriate to his capabilities and circumstances without separating his striving for temporal knowledge from that for eternal knowledge. We are the living people of God who aspire to acquire the truth that we may become icons of the Lord Christ.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Now the instruction which is of God is the right direction of truth to the contemplation of God, and the exhibition of holy deeds in everlasting perseverance,”<sup>847</sup> and “him God helps, by honouring him with closer oversight . . . he inspires those who have made choice of a good life with strength for the rest of their salvation . . . And as the physician ministers health to those who co-operate with him in order to [attain] health, so also God ministers eternal salvation to those who co-operate for the attainment of knowledge and good conduct.”<sup>848</sup>

**Fourth: By disseminating the spirit of hope in the face of illness, old age, and death.** The Lord Christ came to the world to grant humanity the spirit of power and not the spirit of failure (2 Tim. 1:7). Humanity strives bravely in defiance of all harsh conditions. This spirit is essential in the life of the one who truly desires to learn, progress, and be creative.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Do not be afraid of the disease that threatens you, nor of the old age that years bring upon you. Even sickness is powerless if we fulfill the will of God with all our hearts. Knowing this, promise yourself to be strong when you are in illness. Be brave like a mighty warrior in the stadium and conquer your troubles with indomitable steadfastness. Do not allow yourself to be depressed with grief; neither over any disease, nor over any disaster that befalls you.”<sup>849</sup> He also says, “Such an one [the possessor of true knowledge] consequently withstands all fear of everything terrible, not only of death, but also poverty and disease, and ignominy, and things akin to these; being unconquered by pleasure, and lord over irrational desires.”<sup>850</sup>

<sup>846</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.12 (ANF 2:234).

<sup>847</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.7 (ANF 2:223).

<sup>848</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.7 (ANF 2:536).

<sup>849</sup> *Id. Fragments* 5 (44).

<sup>850</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 7.11 (ANF 2:541).

**Fifth: By moderation in all matters.** Christianity calls us to a moderate life in everything, especially eating, drinking, clothing, and entertainment. Christianity draws us out from enslavement to these things and helps us to realize the sublimity of our vocation. Thus, we can devote our minds and hearts to labor for the sake of all humanity, and for the glory we anticipate in heaven. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Contentment is a habit which dispenses with superfluities, and, that there may be no failure, is receptive of what suffices for the healthful and blessed life according to the Word.”<sup>851</sup>

### **1261. What is the New Testament Church’s perspective on philosophy and knowledge?**

The Church of the New Testament was born in the “Age of Philosophy.” The word “philosophy” in the first centuries was roughly the equivalent of the “industrial progress” of medieval Europe, the “scientific progress” of the twentieth century, and “technological progress” of our own time. Rulers prided themselves in being philosophers and highly cultured. The apostle Paul describes the cross as being foolishness to the Greeks (philosophers) (1 Cor. 2:14), whereas it is in reality a superior divine philosophy, “because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men” (1 Cor. 1:25). These philosophers considered the cross to be foolishness because they were incapable of understanding the mystery of the wisdom of God.

And yet, the Church did not disdain philosophy or knowledge. The apostles frequently use the word “know” and its cognates in the New Testament. Knowledge does not stand in tension with faith; rather they are like two closely related sisters who need each other, so long as knowledge is true, and faith is authentic rather than spurious. The Catechetical School of Alexandria was the first Christian institute of learning in the world. The early Church took a broad view of the culture of the society of its day. For example:

**First:** The scholar **Origen** (185–254 A. D.) states that St. Pantaenus, the head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria (who passed away around the year 190) won many philosophers over to the Christian faith by using philosophy.<sup>852</sup>

**Second: St. Clement of Alexandria** (150–215) is considered the first Christian writer to combine faith with philosophy,<sup>853</sup> although he was also aware that some writers had used philosophy to introduce errors into the faith. This saint wore the philosophers’ cloak when

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<sup>851</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.11 (ANF 2:285).

<sup>852</sup> See Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.19.13 (NPNF II/1:267).

<sup>853</sup> Translators’ Note: While there were certainly Christian authors before Clement who brought Christianity and philosophy into dialogue in their writings — such as Justin Martyr, Athenagoras, and even St. Paul the apostle (cf. Acts 17) — Fr Tadros argues in his book (see the following footnote) that Clement took this dialogue in new and important directions.

he taught in the School. He believed that there is no enmity between Christianity and philosophy. His view of philosophy can be summarized as follows:<sup>854</sup>

- a. Philosophy is not a work of darkness — the Logos shines upon all philosophical schools like a ray of light.<sup>855</sup> At the beginning of the *Stromata* he criticizes those who say that philosophy is evil, asserting that it is instead an act of divine management.<sup>856</sup> The goal of the philosophers of all the philosophical schools is the same as the goal of Christianity: the good life; but the difference is that while the philosophers enjoy only a little of the truth, Christianity manifests the full truth in Christ.<sup>857</sup> Philosophy thus falls short of truth<sup>858</sup> but it is still valuable.<sup>859</sup> The philosophers are like children — it is the Lord Christ who brings them to maturity.
- b. He said, “And philosophy—I do not mean the Stoic, or the Platonic, or the Epicurean, or the Aristotelian, but whatever has been well said by each of those sects, which teach righteousness along with a science pervaded by piety,—this eclectic whole I call philosophy.”<sup>860</sup>
- c. He believes that in His care, God neglected no one. God gave the Hebrews the Law as a preparation to lead them to the Lord Christ; and He gave philosophy to the Greeks to lead them to the same goal. He says, “Accordingly, before the advent of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it becomes conducive to piety; being a kind of preparatory training to those who attain to faith through demonstration ... as the law, the Hebrews, ‘to Christ’ (Gal. 3:24). Philosophy, therefore, was a preparation, paving the way for him who is perfected in Christ.”<sup>861</sup>
- d. This saint provides many examples to argue that the Greeks borrowed much from the Old Testament.<sup>862</sup> He says that Plato adopted the opinions of Moses and the prophets, though he did not transmit them accurately. Nevertheless, in defending faith against the philosophers,<sup>863</sup> St. Clement often affirmed that faith is the basis of all knowledge,<sup>864</sup> that faith is greater than knowledge, and that faith is the benchmark against which knowledge is to be tested.<sup>865</sup>

<sup>854</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The School of Alexandria Before Origen* (Sydney: Pope Shenouda III Coptic Theological College, 1995): pp. 158–164.

<sup>855</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.13 (ANF 2:313).

<sup>856</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.4 (ANF 2:304–305).

<sup>857</sup> W. Fairweather, *Origen and Greek Patristic Theology* (Scribner, 1901): p. 15.

<sup>858</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.8 (ANF 2:308–309).

<sup>859</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.15 (ANF 2:315–317).

<sup>860</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.7 (ANF 2:308).

<sup>861</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.5 (ANF 2:305).

<sup>862</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.5 (ANF 2:351–353).

<sup>863</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.2 (ANF 2:348–349).

<sup>864</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.4 (ANF 2:349–351).

<sup>865</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.4 (ANF 2:349–351).

- e. This saint was well acquainted with both the pagan and Christian worlds and was therefore well acquainted with both classical Greek writings and Christian theology. Therefore, he believed that the Church should not discourage catechumens from continuing their philosophical studies, but should instead teach a Christian approach to philosophy through her culture and teaching.

**Third:** It is said that in the second century and the early third century, philosophers became Christians and Christians became philosophers. Philosophers were often represented among the deans and teachers at the Catechetical School of Alexandria.<sup>866</sup>

**Fourth:** It should not surprise us that the Catechetical School of Alexandria did not limit its curriculum to religious studies alone, but was quite encyclopedic in its teaching. This honor of leading Christian thought in the early Church indicates how the Church engaged with the society around it via its culture and learning, sanctifying its potential and capabilities, nurturing it, and developing everything that tended to its edification.

**Fifth:** In his efforts to delineate the true, authentic, and practical Christian “gnosticism,” **St. Clement of Alexandria**, uses the term *gnostic* to denote the spiritual believer.<sup>867</sup> For him, there is no separation of knowledge (*gnosis*) from spirituality.

In **St. Justin Martyr’s** (100–165 A. D.) discourse on philosophy and philosophers, he says, “Our doctrines, then, appear to be greater than all human teaching; because Christ, who appeared for our sakes, became the whole rational being; both body, and reason and soul. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated by finding and contemplating some part of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the Word, which is Christ, they often contradicted themselves.”<sup>868</sup>

## **1262. Were the Christians a sect that was isolated from society?**

Christians lived integrated lives within their broader society; though they had their own cultural understanding, their own teachings, friends, relatives, and neighbors. They did not isolate themselves from the culture into which they were born or from broader society and all that came with it. They lived in the world, but they were not of the world. They had a special vocation to sanctify the world by the work of God through them and within them: “For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:7) and “as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘be holy, for I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:15–16).

In the **Epistle to Diognetus**, which is counted among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, we read that the Christians were not, as [the pagan] Diognetus thought, an isolated

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<sup>866</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The School of Alexandria Before Origen* (Sydney: Pope Shenouda III Coptic Theological College, 1995): Chapters 4–5.

<sup>867</sup> See the Translators’ Note in Section 1257 above.

<sup>868</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 10 (ANF 1:191).

and inward-looking community that formed a separate state with its own language and independent customs; but that the Christian faith embraces openness to all humanity, unlike the Jews. The Epistle says, “The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practise any eccentric way of life.”<sup>869</sup>

The relationship of the Church to the world is like the relationship of the soul to the body — the source of life, she is the leaven of human society, the light that guides the world in the right path. “To put it briefly, the relation of Christians to the world is that of a soul to the body. As the soul is diffused through every part of the body, so are Christians through all the cities of the world. The soul, too, inhabits the body, while at the same time forming no part of it; and Christians inhabit the world, but they are not part of the world. The soul, invisible herself, is immured within a visible body; so Christians can be recognized in the world, but their Christianity itself remains hidden from the eye. The flesh hates the soul, and wars against her without any provocation, because she is an obstacle to its own self-indulgence; and the world similarly hates the Christians without provocation, because they are opposed to its pleasures. All the same, the soul loves the flesh and all its members, despite their hatred for her; and Christians, too, love those who hate them. The soul, shut up inside the body, nevertheless holds the body together; and though they are confined within the world as in a dungeon, it is Christians who hold the world together.”<sup>870</sup>

### 1263. Is the role of faith to criticize culture or to sanctify it?

The scholar **Origen** says that Christianity does not criticize societal cultures, but sanctifies them. He says, “For why is it an evil to have been educated, and to have studied the best opinions, and to have both the reality and appearance of wisdom? ... And it is no hindrance to the knowledge of God.”<sup>871</sup> Also, “The blame then must remain with those who rest in their own ignorance.”<sup>872</sup> Further, “for true wisdom does not mislead, but ignorance does, while of existing things knowledge alone is permanent, and the truth which is derived from wisdom.”<sup>873</sup>

Origen prefers that those with the most prudent and intelligent minds be the ones to draw out the mysteries of the Holy Bible and deeply explore the enigmas of faith.<sup>874</sup> **St. Gregory the Wonderworker of Neocaesarea** (213–270), who was a pupil of Origen, learned that

<sup>869</sup> “Epistle to Diognetus,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 5: p. 144.

<sup>870</sup> “Epistle to Diognetus,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 6: p. 145.

<sup>871</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 3.49 (ANF 4:484).

<sup>872</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 3.44 (ANF 4:482).

<sup>873</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 3.72 (ANF 4:492).

<sup>874</sup> Cf. Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 3.74 (ANF 4:493).

knowledge leads to faith and ignorance leads to blindness, and one cannot be pious without studying philosophy.<sup>875</sup>

St. Gregory the Wonderworker and his brother Athenodorus were both converted to Christianity through the cultured education and intellectual ability of their teacher, Origen. Their teacher instructed his students to study the ideas of the Greek philosophers, whoever they might be, excepting the atheists. He did not allow his disciples to be ignorant of human thought, and he trained them to distinguish truth from falsehood within these thick forests full of thorns.<sup>876</sup>

In his homilies on the Book of Exodus, Origen preaches that Christians can use philosophy to construct the edifice of faith, just as the Hebrews used the gold of the Egyptians to make the items in the tabernacle of meeting.<sup>877</sup>

In his exhortation to the youth, **St. Basil the Great** does not ban reading the poets, historians, and orators, so long as they are useful. He goes on to say, “We ourselves too, if we are wise, having appropriated from this literature what is suitable to us and akin to the truth, will pass over the remainder ... Now if there is some affinity between the two bodies of teachings, knowledge of them should be useful to us; but if not, at least the fact that by setting them side by side we can discover the difference between them, is of no small importance for strengthening the position of the better.”<sup>878</sup>

#### **1264. Was the Christianity of the era of the early Church Fathers based on literary creativity?**

The Christian faith was not based on literary creativity, but it sanctifies all that is creative. Both leaders and laity were encouraged to use their creative talents to produce literature. For example, the martyr **St. Cyprian of Carthage**, who was an eloquent orator before his conversion, in no way diminished in eloquence after he came to the faith. Instead, his faith endowed his eloquence with a singular sweetness that helped him to care for the congregation, whether through spoken or written words. The Church followed the example of the prophets and apostles who wrote in the language of their time and did not undervalue the culture contemporary to them.<sup>879</sup>

What we have said about literary and linguistic creativity and its sanctification for the sake of edifying society in harmony and cooperation with the living and practical faith, we

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<sup>875</sup> St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *The Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen* Argument 6 (ANF 6:27–28).

<sup>876</sup> St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *The Oration and Panegyric Addressed to Origen* Argument 13 (ANF 6:33–34).

<sup>877</sup> Cf. Origen of Alexandria, *Letter to Gregory* 2 (ANF 4:393).

<sup>878</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters IV and Address to the Young Men on Greek Literature*, trans., Roy Joseph Deferarri and Martin R. P. McGuire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934) Address 4, 3: pp. 391, 385.

<sup>879</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 7.59–60 (ANF 4:663).



can also apply to the arts. Rather than undervaluing the arts, the early Church was able to sanctify the arts and use them to inflame the heart with divine love and yearning for heaven. A papyrus found in Egypt contains a Christian melody with music.<sup>880</sup> We also know that the Egyptian **Bishop Nepos** introduced many praises and psalms sung joyfully by the faithful during the reign of Pope Dionysius of Alexandria (190–265).<sup>881</sup>

### 1265. What was the early Church’s attitude towards theaters, stadiums, and floral wreaths?

Theaters and stadiums were often used for ceremonies worshipping pagan deities or the ‘divine’ emperor. These had their own rituals, such as lighting torches and crowning with floral wreaths. Perhaps out of simple or weak faith, some Christians therefore refused to use flowers — not because they were somehow unclean, but because of their association with the worship of demons and idols. Yet, **St. Justin Martyr** (110–165) says, “All that is born is an inviolable gift from God, and cannot be violated by any human action [even if used in pagan rituals]. At any rate, we abstain from using them so that no one might think that we submit to Satan in whose honor alcohol is drunk, or that we are ashamed of our religion. Without doubt, spring flowers bring us joy. We pick the primrose, the iris, and other flowers of extremely delightful colors and fragrant scents, and we use them either individually, or by scattering their petals, or by making from them garlands to adorn our necks.”<sup>882</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Those, then, who are trained by the Word are restrained from the use of crowns [of flowers]; and do not think that this Word, which has its seat in the brain, ought to be bound about, not because the crown is the symbol of the recklessness of revelry, but because it has been dedicated to idols.”<sup>883</sup>

The scholar **Tertullian** (160–225) insists that everything in the world is intrinsically useful, even the stones of theaters, the voice of the singer, the swords, and the plants. What is evil is when they are misused in theaters for obscene singing, murder, or poisoning.<sup>884</sup> In his work *De Spectaculis*, Tertullian often criticizes theaters and stadiums for the following reasons:

- a. In them, human sacrifices are offered to appease the dead (Ch. 12).
- b. In them, shameful deeds are performed, and offensive language is used (Ch. 22).

<sup>880</sup> Translators’ Note: The papyrus (Oxyrhynchus-1786) was discovered in 1922 by Iginio Giordani and dates from the third century. See Paul Henry Lang, *Music in Western Civilization* (NY: W. W. Norton, 1941): pp. 2–3, and C. H. Cosgrove, *An Ancient Christian Hymn with Musical Notation. Papyrus Oxyrhynchus 1786: Text and Commentary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

<sup>881</sup> St. Dionysius of Alexandria, *From the Two Books on the Promises* 1 (ANF 6:81).

<sup>882</sup> Justin 3:2.

<sup>883</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.8 (ANF 2:256).

<sup>884</sup> Tertullian, *The Shows, or De Spectaculis* 2 (ANF 3:79–80).

- c. Crimes of murder are committed in them in the name of sport, thus breaking a foundational divine commandment: “Do not kill” (Ch. 2).
- d. Pagan worship is practiced in them (Ch. 10).
- e. The crimes that the law condemns outside theaters are committed as a matter of course in the theaters (Ch. 17).
- f. What happens in theaters does not only suffocate the eye as an organ of vision, but also affects the mind, whereby a person learns idleness, envy, and anger. It provokes the emotions and corrupts them (Ch. 17).

Tertullian says that Christians are “consecrated to peace,” and if they would be blameworthy for such actions outside the theaters, they should also be blameworthy inside them, for not being faithful to their vocation as a peaceful people (Ch. 16).

After analyzing the reasons why Christians refuse to go to theaters and stadiums, Tertullian says that it must be remembered that “the places in themselves do not contaminate, but what is done in them; from this even the places themselves, we maintain, become defiled” (Ch. 8).



## 7

# The Relationship Between Church and State<sup>885</sup>

### 1266. What is the Church’s attitude towards civil, judicial, and military authorities?

While Christianity calls for obedience to authorities and submission to the state it also focuses on inner peace and forgiveness for sinners, and declines using the sword against adversaries. The believer should apply these commandments, desiring to offer love even to enemies, through the work of the Holy Spirit within him. The apostle Paul says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same” (Rom. 13:1–3), and “therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior” (1 Tim. 2:1–3). The application of these commandments differs according to the conditions in which the faithful live, and according to their spiritual level.

The Church, in the East and the West, has always had a living eschatological<sup>886</sup> mindset, wherein everyone looked for the Second Coming of the Lord Christ with joy and gladness of heart; and on the basis of which, many believers happily relinquished much for the sake of the anticipated eternal glory. Their love and decency drew the attention of the pagans to the lived life of faith, whatever the cost.

Christians were known for their love for all humanity, even for those who resist and persecute them. However, many Christian leaders and laity refused, or at least were not comfortable with the idea of, joining the Roman military; not out of hatred of the military or out of disobedience to the authorities, but because of the nature of the military of the time:

- a. There were many periods when the Roman military was occupied not so much with defending the Roman Empire as with focusing its energy on destroying the Christian faith and exterminating the Christians or compelling them to pagan worship. The scholar **Origen** describes paganism and robbery as two of prevalent sins among the military.<sup>887</sup>

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<sup>885</sup> For more detail, see Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty and Maged Sous, *Faith and Permissiveness (Al'-iman Wal'-iibaha, Arabic)* (1998): Chapter 2.

<sup>886</sup> Translators’ Note: *Eschatological*, from the Greek ἔσχατος (*eschatos*) meaning the farthest, or the end, refers to the Christian concept of the End Times when Christ will return, and the eternal life will begin.

<sup>887</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity: Vol. 16) (Garland Publishing Inc., 1993): pp. 200–201.

An important fact is that from the time of Emperor Nero (54–68 A. D.) to the time of Emperor Constantine (306–337 A. D.), practicing a Christian life was often considered a crime punishable by death.<sup>888</sup> As Christians, it was easier for civilians to escape this penalty than it was for soldiers, who were not permitted to refuse to practice pagan worship. For this reason, the proportion of martyrs who were soldiers was relatively higher than civilians, even though the number of Christian soldiers was few.

- b. The Roman army was known for its violence, rapaciousness, and recklessness. Soldiers were not permitted to practice their married life nor to get married. Therefore, they were left with only two options: compulsory celibacy or adultery.<sup>889</sup>
- c. The early Church refused to enter politics.<sup>890</sup> In his response to Celsus, the scholar **Origen** says, “The Roman Senate, and the princes of the time, and the soldiery, and the people, and the relatives of those who had become converts to the faith, made war upon their doctrine.”<sup>891</sup> Origen’s teacher, **St. Clement of Alexandria**, also wrote about the Roman Empire’s persecution of Christians, not for any crimes they committed but because of their faith.<sup>892</sup> The **Epistle to Diognetus** tells us that martyrdom did not weaken Christianity, but rather the number of Christians has increased.<sup>893</sup> And the scholar **Tertullian** says that the blood of the martyrs was the seed of Christianity.<sup>894</sup>

### **1267. What was the Church Fathers’ attitude towards the emperors who persecuted the faith and towards the Roman army?**

**First: The emergence of Apologists.** The Church faced opposition from the Jews who clung to the literal interpretation of the Law and the Prophets. They awaited the coming of the Messiah, the King, who would restore the ruined tabernacle of David and liberate them from Roman rule. This is why the cross was a stumbling block for them.

<sup>888</sup> *The Annals of Tacitus*, trans., Alfred John Church and William Jackson (MacMillan and Co., 1876): p. 304–305; Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.17, 32 (NPNF II/1:147, 163–164); Lactantius, *On the Manner in Which the Persecutors Died* 2–3, 48 (ANF 7:301–302, 321).

<sup>889</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity: Vol. 16) (Garland Publishing Inc., 1993): p. 227.

<sup>890</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity: Vol. 16) (Garland Publishing Inc., 1993): p. 200.

<sup>891</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 1.3 (ANF 4:398).

<sup>892</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.11 (ANF 2:423).

<sup>893</sup> “Epistle to Diognetus,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 7: p. 146.

<sup>894</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 50 (ANF 3:55). The text refers to “Christians,” which of course means the Christian martyrs.

The Church also faced opposition from some [pagan] philosophers who considered Christians to be uneducated commoners. Thus, there was a need for prodigious philosophers who could defend the Christian faith.

Finally, the Roman empire was a military state of the first order that relied on weapons and expanded through war. Its emperor was the head and commander of the military. At first the Roman empire regarded Christianity as a Jewish sect that was inconsequential, for it was inconceivable that any leader, from the West nor the East, would dare attempt to usurp the rule of the Emperor and establish a new kingdom or empire.

Christians were strangers to violence and the use of weapons. However, as the number of Christians increased in all the lands of the world throughout this period, their ideology of refusing to participate in the state religion and denunciation of war came to be viewed as dangerous.

From the earliest years of Christianity, a group of Christian thinkers called the *Apologists* emerged. They responded to opposition — whether from Jews, philosophers, or authorities — with courage and culture, and by addressing each group using its own language and thought.

**Second: The Christian stance towards pagan religious ceremonies.** Because Christians refused to participate in pagan religious ceremonies, some considered them not to be true Romans — even if they enjoyed Roman citizenship — but rather that they were enemies of the Roman empire. Therefore, the Christian apologists wrote to the Emperor about the faithfulness and loyalty of the Christians to the Emperor, the governing authorities, and the state; and of the Christians’ support for the state.

### **1268. Did Christians refrain from joining the military out of hatred for the Romans?**

Impossible! When St. Luke wrote his Gospel, he addressed it to a ruler and employed the language of love towards them. The apostle Paul also appealed to Caesar (Acts 26:30). In the second century, the scholar **Tertullian** says in his defense of the Church, “The world persecutes the church, and the church loves the world and serves it.” This illustrates the spirit of the Church and of Christians towards the state, even amidst times of persecution. Finally, the scholar **Origen**, the dean of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, believed that in the *pax Romana* (Roman peace) one could see divine help, for this peace facilitated the spread of the Gospel.<sup>895</sup>

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<sup>895</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 2.30 (ANF 4:443–444).

### 1269. Is it appropriate for the Church to pray for the state even if that state opposes the Church and the faithful?

To pray for all humanity is a biblical commandment that the believer is obliged to practice as the natural fruit of sharing the love of Christ with all. The apostle commands that prayers be offered on behalf of kings, rulers, and anyone in a position of leadership. Leaders need heavenly wisdom to be able lead those under them in love and fatherhood, and for the benefit of all. When leaders have peace, there is peace and tranquility for the Church. It is noteworthy that as the early Church emerged, she never entered the political arena; and some Churches have continued in this vein, such as the Coptic Orthodox Church. Yet the Church feels a sense of responsibility towards political figures as leaders who influence people's lives and the lives of local Churches; especially if they persecute the Church and the faith.

The scholar **Tertullian** says that Christians pray on behalf of emperors, ministers, and the state for the sake of the peace of their state and the world.<sup>896</sup> He says, "We pray, too, for the emperors, for their ministers and for all in authority, for the welfare of the world, for the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation .... Thither we lift our eyes, with hands outstretched, because free from sin; with head uncovered, for we have nothing whereof to be ashamed; finally, without a monitor, because it is from the heart we supplicate. Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Cæsar, an emperor would wish."<sup>897</sup>

### 1270. What are the obligations of Christians towards the state?

Christians fulfill their obligations towards the state and towards their fellow citizens not out of fear of the law, but out of self-giving love that gives more than what is asked, with joy and delight. Christians vie with others in giving, not in receiving; without seeking praise or reward. **St. Justin Martyr** says, "And everywhere we, more readily than all men, endeavour to pay to those appointed by you the taxes both ordinary and extraordinary, as we have been taught by Him."<sup>898</sup>

Christians do not try to evade the laws or regulations that rule the home, school, work, or institution to which they belong, nor those of the state or society. They consider obedience to the law as fellowship with the Lord Christ, who out of His love for us obeyed, and even obeyed Saints Mary and Joseph the Carpenter, who were His own creation.

<sup>896</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46–47).

<sup>897</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46).

<sup>898</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 17 (ANF 1:168).

**Tatian** (second century) declared that he was ready to pay his taxes and to serve and obey the emperor, but not to pay the tribute of worship to him because “man is to be honoured as a fellow-man; God alone is to be feared.”<sup>899</sup>

### **1271. Is the life of a Christian the life of a good citizen?**

The Christian — whom the Holy Spirit prepares for heavenly citizenship — will inevitably be an outstandingly good example of citizenship. He is a shining image of the citizen who is full of love and sacrifice, motivated by the presence of God within him. **Tertullian** says, “Or when Christians are brought before you on the mere ground of their name, is there ever found among them an ill-doer of the sort? It is always with your folk [i.e., pagans] the prison is steaming, the mines are sighing, the wild beasts are fed.”<sup>900</sup> He also says that any state that kills so many of its best citizens, namely the Christians, harms itself.<sup>901</sup>

### **1272. What is the Christian attitude towards rulers?**

As a Roman citizen, the scholar **Tertullian** was comfortable with applying the title of “father” to rulers, but he advanced a more profound understanding of the fatherhood of the ruler than the mere imposition of authority. He says, “How can he, who is truly father of his country, be its lord? The name of piety is more grateful than the name of power; so the heads of families are called fathers rather than lords.”<sup>902</sup>

“A Christian is enemy to none, least of all to the Emperor of Rome, whom he knows to be appointed by his God, and so cannot but love and honour; and whose well-being moreover, he must needs desire, with that of the empire over which he reigns so long as the world shall stand—for so long as that shall Rome continue. To the emperor, therefore, we render such reverential homage as is lawful for us and good for him; regarding him as the human being next to God who from God has received all his power, and is less than God alone.”<sup>903</sup>

### **1273. Can the Church consider itself a kind of state?**

From its beginnings, the Church lived in the world, persecuted and cast out. Yet she never established a state for her members, but considered them to be a holy leaven [in the world] whose hearts are attached to their heavenly homeland. As the apostle Paul says, “Therefore, let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come” (Heb. 13:13–14). Truly the Church is the new Israel, a new people with a heavenly mission in the very midst of the world.

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<sup>899</sup> Tatian, *Address to Greeks* 4 (ANF 2:66).

<sup>900</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 44 (ANF 3:50).

<sup>901</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 37 (ANF 3:45).

<sup>902</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 34 (ANF 3:43).

<sup>903</sup> Tertullian, *To Scapula* 2 (ANF 3:105).



The Lord Christ speaks of the believer or the Church as leaven that leavens the whole lump. Many of the early Church Fathers also talked about the community of the Church as an ideal community, the holy city of God, a new life, or the Kingdom of God on earth. Given all these titles that arose through the lived experience of the Church, she never felt the need to become a state within a state, for she is the holy leaven that must closely interact with the dough around it in order to sanctify the whole lump.

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “The universal Father is one, and one the universal Word; and the Holy Spirit is one and the same everywhere, and one is the only virgin mother. I love to call her the Church . . . But she is once virgin and mother — pure as a virgin, loving as a mother.”<sup>904</sup> Christians are a new people, but they are not another race. They are identified by their fellowship, but they are not a race different to other races.

**Origen** says, “Christians are not a single nation but are one people from all nations. And for this reason Moses named them ‘not a nation’ (Deut. 32:21) as a supreme honor since they were not one nation, but can be called a nation of all nations.”<sup>905</sup> The Apostolic Fathers and those who came after them saw the Church as being composed of a new kind of people who form a spiritual army in which every believer knows his station. It has a hierarchical structure whose head is the Lord Christ, the King of kings and the Savior of all, to whom everyone in heaven and on earth submits. Christians fight spiritually under His banner, and whoever deserts Him perishes.

**St. Ignatius of Antioch** says, “Let your baptism endure as your arms; your faith as your helmet; your love as your spear; your patience as a complete panoply. Let your works be the charge assigned to you, that you may obtain for them a most worthy recompense.”<sup>906</sup> The precise structure of Christian churches worried the rulers of the Roman state, who saw them as institutions with their own laws and regulations that might conflict with those of the Roman state and its laws.

**St. Clement of Rome** says, “Let us then, men and brethren, with all energy act the part of soldiers, in accordance with His holy commandments. Let us consider those who serve under our generals, with what order, obedience, and submissiveness they perform the things which are commanded them. All are not prefects, nor commanders of a thousand, nor of a hundred, nor of fifty, nor the like, but each one in his own rank performs the things commanded by the king and the generals. The great cannot subsist without the small, nor the small without the great. There is a kind of mixture in all things, and thence arises mutual advantage.”<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>904</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.6 (ANF 2:220).

<sup>905</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 6–10* 8.6.6 (FOTC 104:152).

<sup>906</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 6 (ANF 1:95).

<sup>907</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 37 (ANF 1:15).

### 1274. Were early Christian communities well organized?

They considered the bishop to be appointed by God, representing the Lord Christ and thus worthy of obedience. When **St. Ignatius of Antioch** was arrested and about to be martyred, bishops, priests, and laity met him at every port to laud him, ask for his blessing, and pray with him.

The scholar **Origen** refers to at least three methods used to appoint bishops: the previous bishop chose his successor; election by the congregation; or election by the priests.<sup>908</sup>

Although the Church was a carefully managed and well-organized community, she remained intent on continuing to be the leaven hidden within the world and fermenting it, refusing to isolate herself from the world. The Church is not a state within a state. Christians do not aspire to establish a separate state for themselves, but belong to one universal (catholic) Church, where they have a new nature in the spiritual life.

The scholar **Tertullian** says, “We are not Indian Brahmins or Gymnosophists, who dwell in woods and exile themselves from ordinary human life ... We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your trafficking — even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit.”<sup>909</sup>

In the **Epistle to Diognetus** (written around the beginning of the second century) we read, “The difference between Christians and the rest of mankind is not a matter of nationality, or language, or customs. Christians do not live apart in separate cities of their own, speak any special dialect, nor practise any eccentric way of life. The doctrine they profess is not the invention of busy human minds and brains, nor are they, like some, adherents of this or that school of human thought. They pass their lives in whatever township — Greek or foreign — each man’s lot has determined; and conform to ordinary local usage in their clothing, diet, and other habits. Nevertheless, the organization of their community does exhibit some features that are remarkable, and even surprising. For instance, though they are residents at home in their own countries, their behaviour there is more like that of transients; they take their full part as citizens, but they also submit to anything and everything as if they were aliens. For them, any foreign country is a motherland, and any motherland is a foreign country.”<sup>910</sup>

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<sup>908</sup> Cf. Everett Ferguson, “Origin and the Election of Bishops” in *Church History* 43, no. 1 (1974) 26–33.

<sup>909</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 42 (ANF 3:49).

<sup>910</sup> “Epistle to Diognetus,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 5: pp. 144–145.

## 8

# Christian Faith and Military Service

### During the first five centuries

It is difficult to summarize the early Church's attitude towards a believer joining military service for the following reasons:

- a. Many of the Church Fathers wrestled with the tension between submission to the authority of the temporal rulers (kings, presidents, etc.) and adherence to the laws of the land (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13, 18) on the one hand; and obedience to the divine commandment to love one's enemies on the other. This tension was especially keen for any Christian who was a judge, required by law to pronounce the death sentence upon murderers, or a recruit in an army at war with enemies.
- b. When the cross appeared to the Emperor Constantine on his way to war, with the phrase, "conquer by this"<sup>911</sup> beneath it, it seemed as if the Crucified One was blessing him in his war.
- c. Some emperors required the army to participate in ceremonies of pagan worship before and after entering battle.

### 1275. What was the Church's view of military service in the era before Constantine?

In the second century, the pagan philosopher Celsus blamed Christians for fleeing from the army and thus not defending the Emperor. **Origen** did not deny this accusation or say that it was a false accusation, for Christians did indeed refuse to participate in wars, much as did the pagan priests who were exempt from military service so that when they made their offerings, they would not do so with blood-stained hands, tainted by killing. For similar reasons, Christians also rightly claimed exemption.<sup>912</sup> Origen pointed out that Christians were loyal to the state, except when it came to participating in an unjust war. In short, they could participate, but only if the war were a just war.

Origen says, "Unless those physical wars bore the figure of spiritual wars, I do not think the books of Jewish history would ever have been handed down by the apostles to the disciples of Christ, who came to teach peace, so that they could be read in the churches ... In short, knowing that now we do not have to wage physical wars, but that the struggles of the soul have to be exerted against spiritual adversaries, the Apostle, just as a military leader,

<sup>911</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Life of Constantine* 1.28 (NPNF II/1:490). Or, "By this sign you shall conquer."

<sup>912</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 8.73 (ANF 4:668–669).

gives an order to the soldiers of Christ, saying, ‘Put on the armor of God, so that you may be able to stand firm against the cunning devices of the Devil’ (Eph. 6:11).”<sup>913</sup>

**St. Augustine** addresses the topic of those wars that God permitted the people to wage against the pagan nations. In his view, the eternal punishment that might befall the evil pagans is far graver than anything they might suffer through war or physical death. He says that “divine providence ... is wont to reform the depraved manners of men by chastisement.”<sup>914</sup>

In his response to Faustus, who criticized the wars of the Old Testament, St. Augustine says, “The account of the wars of Moses will not excite surprise or abhorrence, for in wars carried on by divine command, he showed not ferocity but obedience; and God in giving the command, acted not in cruelty, but in righteous retribution, giving to all what they deserved, and warning those who needed warning ... the real evils in war are love of violence, revengeful cruelty, fierce and implacable enmity, wild resistance, and the lust of power, and such like; and it is generally to punish these things, when force is required to inflict the punishment, that, in obedience to God or some lawful authority, good men undertake wars, when they find themselves in such a position as regards the conduct of human affairs.”<sup>915</sup>

He also says, “And in mercy, also, if such a thing were possible, even wars might be waged by the good, in order that, by bringing under the yoke the unbridled lusts of men, those vices might be abolished which ought, under a just government, to be either extirpated or suppressed.”<sup>916</sup>

## 1276. What is the New Testament Church’s view of war?

**First: Christianity is an invitation to love even enemies.** **St. Ambrose** says, “The Law commands us to avenge one injury with another (cf. Ex. 21:23f). The Gospel invites us to return love in place of enmity, to repay hatred by good will, curses by blessings. It tells us to give assistance to our persecutors.”<sup>917</sup>

**Second: The New Testament is concerned with the inner life.** Without ignoring the external reality in which the believer lives, the New Testament focuses on the inner person or the inner life, because inner transformation is what transforms not only the individual, but also his society. The Lord Christ declared to his disciples, “For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21), and the Christian is able to grant peace (Matt. 10:13) because the peace of God guards his heart (Phil. 4:7). The victorious Christ appears as a lamb (Rev. 5) as an example of victory with the spirit of inner meekness.

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<sup>913</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Joshua* 15.1 (FOTC 105:138).

<sup>914</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God* 1.1 (NPNF I/2:2).

<sup>915</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Against Faustus* 22.74 (NPNF I/4:300–301).

<sup>916</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 138.2 (NPNF I/1:481).

<sup>917</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*. Trans., Ide M. Ni Riain. Dublin: Halcyon Press. 2001) 5.73: p. 141.

As the scholar **Origen** says, “If, therefore, we ought to be peacemakers with those who hate peace, we ought not use the sword against anyone.”<sup>918</sup> And **St. Ambrose** says, “This peace that shuts out the enticements of the bodily passions and calms the disturbances arising from them is nobler than the peace that checks the attacks of barbarians; it is a greater thing to withstand the enemy shut up within oneself than the one that is far off.”<sup>919</sup>

**Third: Military service was not mandatory.** Until the year 170, this was not a problem for Christians, for the Roman state had not yet become a military state in the modern sense. The army represented a small percentage of the population, so there was no need to conscript Christians into the Roman army. Edward A. Ryan argues that in the early Church, there was no problem of military service for Christians since the Romans considered them to be a Jewish sect and the exemption from military service for Jews applied also to Christians.<sup>920</sup>

On the other hand, when the Jews raised a major rebellion against the Romans between 66 and 70 A. D., Vespasian and Titus responded violently, and the Christians crossed the Jordan to Pella and did not participate in the armed resistance defending Jerusalem due to their loyalty to the ruler; for the apostles emphasized the importance of obedience to rulers (1 Pet. 2:13; Rom. 13:1–7). Also, the Lord Christ had already forewarned them of these events and commanded them to flee.

### **1277. What are the views of St. Clement of Rome on participating in military service?**

In his writings, **St. Clement of Rome** speaks of the military command structure of the Roman army not just as a metaphor, but as one who endorses and accepts it.<sup>921</sup> He shows that some Christians served in the army as though they were in the army of God and obeyed military orders. They occupied various ranks and saw the army as an expression of the need we all have for each other, whether big or small; and of the need to live out the spirit of obedience more generally.<sup>922</sup>

### **1278. What are the views of St. Justin Martyr (c. 150 A. D.) on participating in military service?**

He thought that Christians ought not to participate in war because of the things demanded of soldiers, such as denying faith in Christ and offering sacrifices before and after battle. He says, “We who formerly used to murder one another do not only now refrain from making

<sup>918</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew*. Vol. 2, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) Series 102: p. 710.

<sup>919</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Jacob and the Happy Life* 2.6.29 (FOTC 65:163).

<sup>920</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity: Vol. 16) (Garland Publishing Inc., 1993): pp. 217ff.

<sup>921</sup> Cf. R. M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society* (Collins, 1978): pp. 22–23.

<sup>922</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 37 (ANF 1:15).

war upon our enemies, but also, that we may not lie nor deceive our examiners, and willingly die confessing Christ.”<sup>923</sup>

**1279. What are the views of Athenagoras (second century) on participating in military service?**

Athenagoras, a dean of the Catechetical School of Alexandria, says that a Christian cannot bear to see any person killed, even justly.<sup>924</sup> In his defense of Christians, which he addressed to the Emperor and his son, he writes, “For who are more deserving to obtain the things they ask, than those who, like us, pray for your government, that you may, as is most equitable, receive the kingdom, son from father, and that your empire may receive increase and addition, all men becoming subject to your sway? And this is also for our advantage, that we may lead a peaceable and quiet life, and may ourselves readily perform all that is commanded us.”<sup>925</sup>

**1280. What are the views of Tertullian (c. 160–220 A. D.) on participating in military service?**

In the days of the Emperor Marcus Aurelius (161–180 A. D.) we hear of the Twelfth Battalion<sup>926</sup> and the miracle of rain. This incident, mentioned by both **Tertullian**<sup>927</sup> and **Eusebius**,<sup>928</sup> occurred during a Roman battle against the Germans and the Sarmatians. When the Roman legion suffered from great thirst, the Christian division involved in the battle prayed to God for rain to help the Roman army, and this rain eventually contributed to their victory. From this we know that there were a substantial number of Christians in the legion, and that their presence was quite acceptable, and even advantageous to the army in battle.

The scholar **Tertullian** identifies three serious sins: idolatry, adultery, and the shedding of human blood.<sup>929</sup> Therefore, despite his fervent desire to highlight the positive role of Christians in the service of the emperor and his army, he was reluctant to accept that a Christian could join the army and participate in wars. He was unable to reconcile this matter with the Gospel’s call for peace. He says the following:

“We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you — cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum — we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods. For what wars should we not be fit,

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<sup>923</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 39 (ANF 1:175–176).

<sup>924</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea For Christians* 35 (ANF 2:147).

<sup>925</sup> Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 37.2–3 (ANF 2:148).

<sup>926</sup> Legio 12 fulminate.

<sup>927</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 5 (ANF 3:21–22); Tertullian, *To Scapula* 4 (ANF 3:106–107).

<sup>928</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.5.1–6 (NPNF II/1:219–220).

<sup>929</sup> Tertullian, *On Modesty* 12 (ANF 4:85–86).

not eager, even with unequal forces, we who so willingly yield ourselves to the sword, if in our religion it were not counted better to be slain than to slay?”<sup>930</sup>

“So we sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you; and in like manner we unite with you in your traffickings”<sup>931</sup>

“Without ceasing, for all our emperors we offer prayer. We pray for life prolonged; for security to the empire; for protection to the imperial house; for brave armies, a faithful senate, a virtuous people, the world at rest, whatever, as man or Caesar, an emperor would wish.”<sup>932</sup>

“But how will a *Christian man* war, nay, how will he serve even in peace, without a sword, which the Lord has taken away (Matt. 26:52; 2 Cor. 10:4; John 18:36)? For albeit soldiers had come unto John and had received the formula of their rule (see Luke 3:12–13); albeit, likewise, a centurion had believed (Matt. 8:5 etc.; Luke 7:1 etc.); *still* the Lord afterward, in disarming Peter, unbelted every soldier. No dress is lawful among us, if assigned to any unlawful action.”<sup>933</sup>

In the days of **Septimius Severus** (193–211 A. D.), civil governmental business greatly increased and was undertaken by military personnel. That is why a person could join the army without participating in battle or even exercising the duties of the police (disciplining criminals).

It is mentioned in the *Apostolic Tradition* attributed to **St. Hippolytus of Rome**, that, “A soldier in command must be told not to kill people; if he is ordered so to do, he shall not carry it out. Nor should he take the oath. If he will not agree, he should be rejected. Anyone who has the power of the sword, or who is a civil magistrate wearing the purple, should desist, or he should be rejected. If a catechumen or a believer wishes to become a soldier they should be rejected, for they have despised God.”<sup>934</sup>

### 1281. What are the views of St. Irenaeus of Lyon on participating in military service?

**St. Irenaeus** (second century A. D.) interprets the prophecy about swords being beaten into plowshares for farming as being fulfilled in Christians who are unschooled in the culture of fighting, who turn the other cheek when they are struck.<sup>935</sup> Micah the prophet says, “He shall judge between many peoples, and rebuke strong nations afar off; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword

<sup>930</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 37 (ANF 3:45).

<sup>931</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 42 (ANF 3:49).

<sup>932</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 30 (ANF 3:42).

<sup>933</sup> Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19.1–3 (ANF 3:73).

<sup>934</sup> St. Hippolytus of Rome, *On the Apostolic Tradition* 16.8–10 (PP 22:100).

<sup>935</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 4.34.4 (ANF 1:512).

against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore” (Mic. 4:3). And Isaiah the prophet says, “‘The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent’s food. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,’ says the Lord” (Isa. 65:25). Through Christ Jesus, human nature is transformed, the spirit of enmity is banished from it, and replaced by the spirit of love and unity; even between the wolf and the lamb, the lion and the cow, the serpent and the human. People of backgrounds with very different characteristics, some of which are quite fierce, all become one people under the leadership of the Holy Spirit of God.

### **1282. What are the views of St. Clement of Alexandria on participating in military service?**

Like his predecessor Athenagoras, St. Clement believed that wars are inspired by demons<sup>936</sup> (pagan deities). On several occasions, he refers to Christians as a “people of peace.”<sup>937</sup> In his defense of the idea that men and women must abide by the same morals in their behavior, he responds to the objection that women, unlike men, were not trained for war. Applying the principle of equality, he argues that men too should not be trained for war.<sup>938</sup> He also says, “For it is not in war, but in peace, that we are trained. War needs great preparation, and luxury craves profusion; but peace and love, simple and quiet sisters, require no arms nor excessive preparation,”<sup>939</sup> and “in their wars, therefore, the Etruscans use the trumpet, the Arcadians the pipe, the Sicilians the pectides [small lyre], the Cretans the lyre, the Lacedæmonians the flute, the Thracians the horn, the Egyptians the drum, and the Arabians the cymbal. The one instrument of peace, the Word alone by which we honor God, is what we employ.”<sup>940</sup>

He draws an analogy between the army of Christ, which does not shed blood, and temporal armies: “The loud trumpet, when sounded, collects the soldiers, and proclaims war. And shall not Christ, breathing a strain of peace to the ends of the earth, gather together His own soldiers, the soldiers of peace? The trumpet of Christ is His Gospel. He has blown it, and we have heard. ‘Let us array ourselves in the armor of peace, putting on the breastplate of righteousness, and taking the shield of faith, and binding our brows with the helmet of salvation; and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,’ (Eph. 6:14–17) let us sharpen. So the apostle in the spirit of peace commands. These are our invulnerable weapons: armed with these, let us face the evil one.”<sup>941</sup>

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<sup>936</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 3 (ANF 2:183–184).

<sup>937</sup> Cf. St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.2, 3.11, 3.12 (*Hymn: III*) (ANF 2:246, 284, 296).

<sup>938</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.8 (ANF 2:419–421).

<sup>939</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.12 (ANF 2:234).

<sup>940</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.4 (ANF 2:248–249).

<sup>941</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11 (ANF 2:204) amended.



Throughout his era, there were Christian soldiers in the military, so although these passages urge us to peace, we can still find in them his approval of defending one's homeland and of obedience in the military. That may also be why St. Clement does not hesitate to praise Moses as a military leader,<sup>942</sup> and he points out that in the Gospels, "Also to the soldiers, by John, He [Jesus] commands, 'to be content with their wages only.'"<sup>943</sup>

When Clement speaks of the calling of all humanity to faith, he does not exclude those in the military. He says, "Practise husbandry, we say, if you are a husbandman; but while you till your fields, know God. Sail the sea, you who are devoted to navigation, yet call the while on the heavenly Pilot. Has knowledge taken hold of you while engaged in military service? Listen to the commander [Christ], who orders righteousness."<sup>944</sup> Thus, St. Clement advises that if a soldier comes to the faith while he is in the army, he should continue in his position, but he must submit to the divine Commander.

### **1283. What are the views of Minucius Felix on participating in military service?**

Towards the end of the second century, the apologist Minucius Felix — a pagan who accepted Christianity — said that Christians could not bear to hear or see a someone being killed.<sup>945</sup>

### **1284. What are the views of St. Cyprian of Carthage (departed 258 A. D.) on participating in military service?**

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** was a disciple of the scholar Tertullian and one of the most important Western theological writers of Northwest Africa. It seems that he did not treat this subject in so straightforward a manner as his did his teacher. He believes that God created iron to be used in the cultivation of land, not to kill people in wars.<sup>946</sup> He rebukes a world in which it is considered unacceptable for an individual to kill another in self-defense, yet acceptable to kill others in defense of the nation: "The whole world is wet with mutual blood; and murder, which in the case of an individual is admitted to be a crime, is called a virtue when it is committed wholesale."<sup>947</sup>

He completely refuses the idea of the hand being extended in violence and thereby stained with blood, insisting that, "after the Eucharist carried in it ... the hand [must not be] spotted with the sword and blood."<sup>948</sup> He seems to believe that wars are unavoidable,<sup>949</sup> and ascribes

<sup>942</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 1.24 (ANF 2:304–305).

<sup>943</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.12 (ANF 2:293). These words are in fact found in Luke 3:14.

<sup>944</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 10 (ANF 2:200).

<sup>945</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 30 (ANF 4:191–192).

<sup>946</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 2: On the Dress of Virgins* 11 (ANF 5:433).

<sup>947</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles* 1.6 (ANF 5:277).

<sup>948</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 9: On the Advantage of Patience* 14 (ANF 5:488).

<sup>949</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 7: On the Mortality* 2 (ANF 5:469).

the weakness of the imperial military forces in his days to divine punishment.<sup>950</sup> He prays for the success of the empire’s armies in expelling its enemies.

St. Cyprian uses soldiers in battle as a metaphor for spiritual warfare: “It is a good soldier’s duty to defend the camp of his general against rebels and enemies,”<sup>951</sup> and “if to soldiers of this world it is glorious to return in triumph to their country when the foe is vanquished, how much more excellent and greater is the glory, when the devil is overcome, to return in triumph to paradise”<sup>952</sup> Such passages make it difficult to hold that St. Cyprian considers war to be an immoral act.

### **1285. What are the views of the scholar Origen on participating in military service?**

The scholar **Origen** states, “[God] nowhere teaches that it is right for His own disciples to offer violence to any one, however wicked. For He did not deem it in keeping with such laws as His, which were derived from a divine source, to allow the killing of any individual whatever.”<sup>953</sup>

Origen was asked to refute a book by the pagan philosopher Celsus, in which he attacked Judaism and Christianity by every means possible. One of Celsus’ accusations was that if everyone behaved like the Christians, the Emperor would be forsaken and abandoned by all, and would fall into the hands of the lawless barbarians.<sup>954</sup> It is possible that Celsus may have come across Christians who had resigned from military service after accepting the Christian faith, or Christians who refused to join the military; but given that there were Christians in the Roman army, his argument is quite unconvincing. In fact, the earliest record of the Thundering Legion<sup>955</sup> under the leadership of Marcus Aurelius in the year 173 A. D. dates to the same period as that in which Celsus wrote his work. After this period, we find copious evidence of the increase of Christians in the military ranks.<sup>956</sup>

In refuting this accusation, Origen does not ask the Christians to join the Roman army, but rather to support the Emperor in the capacity of a spiritual army of Christ ranged against the devil who stirs up wars. Origen believes that the service that a Christian can offer to the Emperor is in the realm of the spirit, not the realm of war and murder. He says, “Do not those who are priests at certain shrines, and those who attend on certain gods, as you account them, keep their hands free from blood, that they may with hands unstained and free from human blood offer the appointed sacrifices to your gods; and even when war is upon you, you never

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<sup>950</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 5: An Address to Demetrianus* 3, 17 (ANF 5:458, 463).

<sup>951</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles* 72.10 (ANF 5:381).

<sup>952</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 11: Exhortation to Martyrdom, Addressed to Fortunatus* 13 (ANF 5:506).

<sup>953</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 3.7 (ANF 4:467).

<sup>954</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 8.68–69 (ANF 4:666–667).

<sup>955</sup> See the comments on the Twelfth Legion in Section 1280 above.

<sup>956</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity: Vol. 16) (Garland Publishing Inc., 1993): p. 196.

enlist the priests in the army. If that, then, is a laudable custom, how much more so, that while others are engaged in battle, these too should engage as the priests and ministers of God, keeping their hands pure, and wrestling in prayers to God on behalf of those who are fighting in a righteous cause, and for the king who reigns righteously, that whatever is opposed to those who act righteously may be destroyed! And as we by our prayers vanquish all demons who stir up war, and lead to the violation of oaths, and disturb the peace, we in this way are much more helpful to the kings than those who go into the field to fight for them . . . And none fight better for the king than we do. We do not indeed fight under him, although he require it; but we fight on his behalf, forming a special army—an army of piety—by offering our prayers to God.”<sup>957</sup>

Elsewhere he says, “For we no longer take up ‘sword against nation,’ nor do we ‘learn war any more,’ having become children of peace, for the sake of Jesus, who is our leader, instead of those whom our fathers followed, among whom we were strangers to the covenant.”<sup>958</sup>

### **1286. What are the views of St. Dionysius of Alexandria on participating in military service?**

It seems that **St. Dionysius of Alexandria** (third century) rejected service in the Roman army, or at least to fighting others, saying, “Love is altogether and for ever on the alert, and casts about to do some good even to one who is unwilling to receive it.”<sup>959</sup>

### **1287. What are the views of Arnobius (died around 330 A. D.) on participating in military service?**

**Arnobius** emphasizes that, “evil ought not to be requited with evil (Matt. 5:39), that it is better to suffer wrong than to inflict it, that we should rather shed our own blood than stain our hands and our conscience with that of another, an ungrateful world is now for a long period enjoying a benefit from Christ, inasmuch as by His means the rage of savage ferocity has been softened, and has begun to withhold hostile hands from the blood of a fellow-creature”<sup>960</sup>

Arnobius criticizes Rome for having destroyed some nations and subjected others to its yoke.<sup>961</sup> At the same time, he defends the Christians against the accusation that many misfortunes befell the Roman state because of Christian differences to paganism. In his apology, he points out that if one considers the three hundred years since Christianity arose, “In these years and seasons that have intervened, victories innumerable have been gained

<sup>957</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 8.73 (ANF 4:669).

<sup>958</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 5.33 (ANF 4:558).

<sup>959</sup> St. Dionysius of Alexandria, *Epistles* 14 (ANF 6:110).

<sup>960</sup> Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 1.6 (ANF 6:415).

<sup>961</sup> Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 2.1 (ANF 6:433).

from the conquered enemy,—that the boundaries of the empire have been extended, and that nations whose names we had not previously heard, have been brought under our power.”<sup>962</sup> Does he mean that Christians served in the army or that they were praying for the empire?

**1288. What are the views of Lactantius (c. 240–320 A. D.) on participating in military service?**

**Lactantius** lived through Constantine’s conversion to Christianity, so his writings before Constantine’s conversion differ from those after his conversion. In his early writings, Lactantius rejects the right of a Christian to defend himself, even against who cause him harm; else he would lose his status as a righteous man. He says, “Thus it will be neither lawful for a just man to engage in warfare, since his warfare is justice itself, nor to accuse anyone of a capital charge, because it makes no difference whether you put a man to death by word, or rather by the sword, since it is the act of putting to death itself which is prohibited. Therefore, with regard to this precept of God, there ought to be no exception at all; but that it is always unlawful to put to death a man, whom God willed to be a sacred animal.”<sup>963</sup> After the rise of Constantine, Lactantius softened his opposition to killing in war and to the judicial death penalty.

**1289. What can we learn from the dialogues between the martyrs and rulers?**

These testify to the martyrs’ refusal to join the army or bear the marks of a soldier. In Numidia in the year 295 A. D., Maximilian said to the Proconsul Dion, “I shall not serve ... You may cut off my head, I will not serve this world, but only my God ... I will not accept the seal of this world; and, if you give it to me, I shall break it, for it is worthless. I am a Christian. I cannot wear a piece of lead around my neck after I have received the saving sign of Jesus Christ my Lord, the son of the living God. You do not know him; yet he suffered for our salvation; God delivered him up for our sins (cf. Acts 2:22–24; Rom. 8:32).”<sup>964</sup>

Clearly, Maximilian believed, like Tertullian, that the seal of the army and the seal of baptism were incompatible with each other,<sup>965</sup> because serving in the army was connected to pagan worship. Their refusal was not about avoiding battle, as is clear from the dialogue of the martyr Julius the Veteran.<sup>966</sup>

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<sup>962</sup> Arnobius, *Against the Heathen* 1.14 (ANF 6:417).

<sup>963</sup> Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 6.20 (ANF 7:187).

<sup>964</sup> H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Clarendon Press, 1972) 17.2: pp. 245–247.

<sup>965</sup> Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 19 (ANF 3:73).

<sup>966</sup> H. Musurillo, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Clarendon Press, 1972): pp. 261–265.

**1290. What were the Church’s views on participating in military service after the reign of the Emperor Constantine?**

**Eusebius of Caesarea** (c. 260–340 A.D.) considered Constantine to be the representative of God on earth. He says, “And as he who is the common Saviour of mankind, by his invisible and Divine power as the good shepherd, drives far away from his flock, like savage beasts, those apostate spirits which once flew through the airy tracts above this earth, and fastened on the souls of men; so this his friend [i.e., Constantine], graced by his heavenly favor with victory over all his foes, subdues and chastens the open adversaries of the truth in accordance with the usages of war.”<sup>967</sup> He also tells us that Constantine would pray to the Lord Christ before entering the battle.<sup>968</sup>

Eusebius offers a solution to the problem of the two differing attitudes among Christians towards military service. A Christian can follow the path of the laity, who can partake of pure marriage, just war, and civil service. Or, a Christian can take the path of priesthood, which demands virginity, poverty, separation from the world, and complete devotion to God.<sup>969</sup>

**1291. What were the views of the Council of Arles in 314 and the Council of Nicaea in 325 on participating in military service?**

Canon 3 of the Council of Arles states, “Concerning those who lay down their weapons in peacetime, be it resolved that they be excluded from fellowship.” Perhaps “in time of peace” refers to a time without persecution, when Christians were required not to leave military service. Everett Ferguson says that this canon has been quite difficult for commentators to understand.<sup>970</sup> Most scholars think that “in the time of peace” here refers to times of peace for the *Church*, during which Christians should not leave the army, while in times of persecution of the Church, they should leave the army that is the instrument of their persecution. Others interpret “in the time of peace” to refer to a time of peace for the *state*, when a Christian ought to serve in the army, carrying out duties such as civil policing and keeping the peace. But, if war breaks out, he should abandon military service to avoid killing others.

From **Council of Nicaea** in 325 A. D., we have a canon that contradicts that of the Council of Arles. It states that, “As many as were called by grace, and displayed the first zeal, having cast aside their military girdles, but afterwards returned, like dogs, to their own vomit, (so that some spent money and by means of gifts regained their military stations); let

<sup>967</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Oration in Praise of Constantine* 2.3 (NPNF II/1:583).

<sup>968</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 9.9.2 (NPNF II/1:363).

<sup>969</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Proof of the Gospel, Vol. 1*, trans., W. J. Ferrar (New York: MacMillan, 1920) 1.8: pp. 48–50.

<sup>970</sup> Everett Ferguson (ed.), *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality, and Discipline in the Early Church* (Studies in Early Christianity: Vol. 16) (Garland Publishing Inc., 1993): p. 204.

these, after they have passed the space of three years as hearers, be for ten years prostrators.”<sup>971</sup>

According to the canons attributed to **St. Hippolytus of Rome** (336–340), a Christian may not voluntarily join the army, but he can acquiesce to being conscripted. If he must bear a sword, he must not be ordered to kill.

**1292. What are the views of St. Basil the Great (c. 326–379) on participating in military service?**

**St. Basil the Great** excluded those who extend their hands to violence from the hodies. This sensibility is also found in the writings of his contemporary St. Ambrose of Milan, who insists that priests must not use violence under any circumstance. And when St. Basil talks about the heavenly battle with Satan, he borrows an analogy from the structure and rules of an army.<sup>972</sup>

**1293. What are the views of St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397) on participating in military service?**

**St. Ambrose of Milan** says, “For courage, which in war preserves one’s country from the barbarians, or at home defends the weak, or comrades from robbers, is full of justice”<sup>973</sup> And of courage in battle he says, “For it prefers death to slavery and disgrace.”<sup>974</sup> It would be wrong to think that St. Ambrose lent his approval to Christianity adopting all Roman practices and principles, regardless of the scriptural commandments of peace and longsuffering. He said, “Military courage is itself often militates against peace.”<sup>975</sup>

**1294. What are the views of St. Augustine (354–430 A. D.) on participating in military service?**

**St. Augustine** has been called “the author of the ‘theory of just war.’”<sup>976</sup> His view may be summarized in the following points:

**First:** He believes that the use of force or authority is an important aspect of the edifice of the state, for it protects society from evildoers, and allows children to grow up in safety. He says, “Surely, it is not without purpose that we have the institution of the power of kings, the death penalty of the judge, the barbed hooks of the executioner, the weapons of the soldier, the right of punishment of the overlord, even the severity of the good father. All those

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<sup>971</sup> *Canons of the Council of Nicaea* Canon 12 (NPNF II/14:27).

<sup>972</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *An Introduction to the Ascetical Life* (FOTC 9:9).

<sup>973</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 1.27.129 (NPNF II/10:22).

<sup>974</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 1.41.211 (NPNF II/10:34).

<sup>975</sup> *Discourse on Psalm 118:21*, 17.

<sup>976</sup> Louis J. Swift, *The Early Fathers on War and Military Service* (Michael Glazier Inc., 1985): p. 110.

things have their methods, their causes, their reasons and their practical benefits. While these are feared, the wicked are kept within bounds and the good life more peacefully among the wicked.”<sup>977</sup>

**Second:** The Christian seeks what is good in the earthly city just as he seeks it in the heavenly city. In his opinion, the peace of the temporal city cannot be attained without waging war and defeating enemies who would destroy it. Thus, temporal peace is a good thing; but this peace can become misery or increase misery when a person is constantly occupied with temporal matters — however good — and neglects heavenly glory.<sup>978</sup>

**Third:** When a leader engages an opposing enemy in battle, his goal should be to ultimately achieve peace. If he is forced to kill, it should be out of necessity and not out of an inner lust for revenge or killing.<sup>979</sup>

**Fourth:** Although there are times when war is unavoidable, it is always more glorious to find peaceful resolutions through persuasion or treaties than it is to fight bravely.<sup>980</sup>

**Fifth:** St. Augustine distinguishes between just and unjust wars, but he also says that because of sin, there are actions that are unjust towards others and that a wise person may find it necessary to respond by initiating or waging war. Sin is never from one side only, but from both sides; the side provoking war and the side responding in kind. The former sins by being unjust, while the latter enters into war as kind of divine chastisement for his previous sins: “It would be worse that the injurious should rule over those who are more righteous.”<sup>981</sup>

**Sixth:** Even where war is demanded by wisdom to repel the evil deeds the other side, one should not boast if one should be victorious, as though he had performed a good deed; for it would have been better if the situation were resolved without the shedding of blood.

**Seventh:** Wars are unavoidable in every age. While St. Augustine speaks of the blessings of peace and the bitterness of conflicts and of civil and foreign wars, he wonders in one of his letters if there ever was a time when the world did not suffer from wars in one place or another.<sup>982</sup> In his book *The City of God*, his answer is that such universal peace will only be achieved when we see God, the source of peace, face to face in the heavenly Jerusalem.<sup>983</sup>

<sup>977</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters*, Vol. III (131–164) 153 (FOTC 20:293).

<sup>978</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 15.4 (NPNF I/2:286).

<sup>979</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 189 (FOTC 30:269–270).

<sup>980</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters*, Volume V (204–270) 229 (FOTC 32:152–153).

<sup>981</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 4.15 (NPNF I/2:72).

<sup>982</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 199.35 (FOTC 30:384).

<sup>983</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 17.13 (NPNF I/2:352).

**Eighth:** Military duty does not in itself make a believer evil. He says, “I mean it isn't being a soldier that prevents you doing good, but being evil-minded.”<sup>984</sup>

**Ninth:** On the question of divinely-commanded killing or killing in obedience to the [Old Testament] Law: while the divine commandment says, “You shall not kill” (Matt. 19:18; Ex. 20:13; Deut. 5:17), St. Augustine thinks that there are exceptions to this commandment, such as God's command to kill as a fulfillment of divine justice, or as a matter of chastisement. When a head of state decides to go to war to defend his country, the commander or soldier who obeys the ruler is not counted as a murderer.<sup>985</sup>

### **1295. What are the views of St. John Cassian on participating in military service?**

In *The Institutes*, he discusses the renunciation of the world (in daily life and the virtues appropriate to it) and writes for the benefit of those who abandon this world.<sup>986</sup> He says that the monk begins with true humility and complete obedience as the basis on which he ascends to the heights of other virtues. He presents a few examples of the behavior of some of the elders who were eminent in this virtue. His first example is **Abba John**, who lived near Lycopolis (Asiut) in the region of Thebes, and who attained to the gift of prophecy because of his astonishing obedience. He even became famous among the kings of this world, such that “the Emperor Theodosius did not venture to declare war against the most powerful tyrants before he was encouraged by his utterances and replies: trusting in which as if they had been brought to him from heaven he gained victories over his foes in battles which seemed hopeless.”<sup>987</sup>

In the Litany of the King (or Ruler) in the Liturgy of **St. Cyril the Great** we pray, “May all the barbarians, the nations that desire war against all our prosperity be subdued unto him.”

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<sup>984</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VIII: Sermons 273-305A*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotell (New City Press, 1993) 302.15: p. 307.

<sup>985</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 47 (FOTC 12:230).

<sup>986</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 4.23 (NPNF II/11:226).

<sup>987</sup> St. John Cassian, *Institutes* 4.23 (NPNF II/11:226).



## 9

## Christian Faith and Social and Familial Relationships

### 1296. What is the extent of the believer's relationship with his family and his brothers and sisters in humanity?

Our pure Christian faith is a calling for us to recover what we have lost because of sin by becoming an icon of God, the Lover of humanity. One must carry all humanity in his heart, even if he is a solitary hermit in a cave in the wilderness or an anchorite who does not look upon another human face for years at a time. This hermit or monk must translate his love into unceasing prayers for every human being in this world to receive salvation and heavenly inner peace. He must not cease from offering fasts and prostrations for everyone, as well as putting this love into action whenever he can.

### 1297. Are social relationships necessary?

Neither the Church, nor any individual as a living member of the Church, should have a negative or indifferent attitude towards others, for the human being is social by nature and faith restores us to our original state as an image of God, the Lover of humanity. Friendship, cooperation, and any social activity should not merely be a matter of changeable human emotions, but emerge from sincere love as a divine gift.

**St. Basil the Great** says, “we need the help of each one of our brethren more than one hand needs the other. Then, too, the Lord has taught us the necessity of unity of action from the very construction of our bodies. For, when I reflect upon these our limbs, that not one of them is sufficient in itself for activity, how shall I consider that I alone am strong enough to combat the troubles of life? In fact, neither could one foot move safely forward unless the other helped to support it, nor could the eye see clearly if it did not have the other as its partner, and if it did not, in harmony with it, cast its glance upon the objects to be seen. The hearing is more accurate when it receives the sound through both channels; the grasp is stronger through the cooperation of the fingers. And, in general, I see that none of the actions performed either naturally or by inclination is accomplished without the agreement of kindred forces, since even prayer itself which does not come from persons praying together is much feebler, the Lord having declared that He will be in the midst if two or three call upon Him with oneness of mind (Matt. 18:20).”<sup>988</sup>

### 1298. What motivates positive relationships?

**First: Offering love to others as if to Christ Himself.** Christians express love for others, even for those who persecute them. The positivity of the Church, both individually and

<sup>988</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters* 97 (FOTC 13:215).

collectively, in serving all, gave her the ability to win non-believers to the faith, often in the face of death, and even in the case of catechumens who had not yet been baptized. **St. Justin Martyr** says, “We who valued above all things the acquisition of wealth and possessions, now bring what we have into a common stock, and communicate to everyone in need.”<sup>989</sup> Such works filled with love did not stem from mere human emotions, but from holy sentiments and from hearts inflamed with divine love. These believers offered these works with all their being and from the depths of their hearts and linked them to their worship so that they became offerings to God Himself, the Lover of humanity.

**Second: The practice of love is the perfection of the law.** The Lord Christ set out the foundation of the law of Christian behavior: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34–35). St. Paul says, “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Rom. 13:8). The apostles did not dictate specific moral laws, but offered instead the Spirit who institutes these laws and who governs Christian conduct in each situation. It was left to the Church to work out the details of a living spiritual conduct based on biblical foundations without introducing too many rules: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things” (Phil. 4:8).

**Third: Using our new potential.** In baptism we enjoy burial with Christ and we die to sin so that it has no power over us unless we willingly accept it. We also become children of God and enjoy the potential of the Holy Trinity: the fatherhood of the Father who loves all humanity; the grace of the Son the forgiver of sins; and the communion of the Holy Spirit who sanctifies and renews us so that we may become an icon of Christ.

The **Didache**,<sup>990</sup> for example, offers us a choice between the way of life and the way of death,<sup>991</sup> but does not list in detail the virtues that should govern our conduct, nor does it make a complete list of the vices that lead us onto the way of death. It says, “There are two ways, one of life and one of death; but a great difference between the two ways. The way of life, then, is this: First, you shall love God who made you; second, your neighbour as yourself; and all things whatsoever you would should not occur to you, do not also do to another. And of these sayings the teaching is this: Bless those who curse you, and pray for your enemies, and fast for those who persecute you. For what reward is there, if you love

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<sup>989</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 14 (ANF 1:167).

<sup>990</sup> The title *Didache* derives from the first word in the Greek title of the work: Διδαχή Κυρίου διὰ τῶν δώδεκα ἀποστόλων τοῖς ἔθνεσιν (*The Lord's Teaching Through the Twelve Apostles to the Nations*). It is considered the most important document after the writings of the apostles and describes the life of the early Church in every aspect: behavior, liturgy, and organization.

<sup>991</sup> “The Didache” in Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth, eds., *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 1–5: pp. 191–193.

those who love you? Do not also the Gentiles do the same? But love those who hate you, and you shall not have an enemy. Abstain from fleshly and worldly lusts. If someone gives you a blow upon your right cheek, turn to him the other also, and you shall be perfect.”

**1299. Is it permissible to defend oneself, one’s family, and one’s homeland?<sup>992</sup>**

In order for a Christian to live in society successfully, adhering to its laws and customs, he must be well acquainted with them, submitting to them according to God’s commandment: “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s” (Mark 12:17). We must also keep in mind that most of the laws that govern our lives are consistent with the teachings of the Holy Bible and the Church, as St. Paul says, “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom. 13:1). Christianity invites us not only to love and forgive, but also to be lawful. It urges the Christian to resort to the law to manage matters, so that whoever has been wronged or deprived of his rights should seek redress through the legal channels of society.

The filing of lawsuits was stipulated in ancient times in Jewish Law (Deut. 17:8–9). Roman law permitted its subjects to appeal their cases to the emperor if they were not satisfied with a ruling of the governors of the provinces and colonies. Therefore, St. Paul appealed his case to Caesar (Acts 25:11).

The Christian sometimes finds himself in a position that obligates him to defend himself, his family, or his homeland where he is confronted with a certain danger, and where if he waits for state agencies to take action, he might lose his own life or the life of a loved one. For this reason, some statutory laws follow the teaching of the heavenly Bible in recognizing certain situations in which a person is allowed to repel danger without incurring legal or religious blame. In the spirit of godliness, St. Paul tells his disciple, “Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work” (Titus 3:1).

**1300. How did the Law of Moses endeavor to raise humanity to levels of greater righteousness?**

In his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, **St. Augustine** examines the development of the relationship between a person and his fellow human being, beginning from primitive humans who initiated harm to others, to the perfect human who rejoices in bearing the weaknesses of others:<sup>993</sup> “It is the lesser righteousness of the Pharisees not to go beyond measure in revenge, that no one should give back more than he has received: and this is a great step. For it is not easy to find anyone who, when he has received a blow, wishes

<sup>992</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty and Maged Sous, *Faith and Permissiveness (Al'-iman Wal'-iibaha*, Arabic) (1998): pp. 10ff.

<sup>993</sup> All the quotes in this section come from St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.19.56–57 (NPNF I/6:24–25).

merely to return the blow; and who, on hearing one word from a man who reviles him, is content to return only one, and that just an equivalent; but he avenges it more immoderately, either under the disturbing influence of anger, or because he thinks it just, that he who first inflicted injury should suffer more severe injury than he suffered who had not inflicted injury. Such a spirit was in great measure restrained by the law, where it was written, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’ [Ex. 21:24]; by which expressions a certain measure is intended, so that the vengeance should not exceed the injury. And this is the beginning of peace: but perfect peace is to have no wish at all for such vengeance ... by means of which enactment the transition is made from the highest discord [i.e., the human desire to take vengeance beyond the extent of one’s injury] to the highest concord [taking vengeance commensurate to one’s injury], according to the distribution of times.” But St. Augustine shows us that the Gospel of Christ takes us even further than the Law:

- a. The morally primitive person injures his brother.
- b. “That man, however, who is not the first to do harm to anyone, but who yet, when injured, inflicts a greater injury in return, either in will or in deed,” has not yet reached the level of the law given by Moses.
- c. The Law of Moses requires a person not to repay more evil than he suffered.
- d. More advanced is the person who “does not pay back as much, but less; as, for instance, one blow instead of two.”
- e. “He who, rising above this, pays back nothing at all, approaches the Lord’s precept, but yet he does not reach it.”
- f. As for Christian perfection: “not only are you not to pay back what may have been inflicted on you, but you are not even to resist other inflictions. For this is what He also goes on to explain: ‘But whosoever shall smite you on your right cheek, turn to him the other also’ (Matt. 5:39) ... And so, as regards those whom the Lord, the Physician of souls, was instructing to take care of their neighbours, what else could He teach them, than that they endure quietly the infirmities of those whose welfare they wish to consult? For all wickedness arises from infirmity of mind.”

### **1301. What are the limits of chastisement in the New Testament?**

Rulers are required to chastise the wicked and criminals as the apostle says, “Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgement on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, be afraid; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s

minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practises evil. Therefore you must be subject, not only because of wrath but also for conscience' sake" (Rom. 13:1–5).

It is clear that the New Testament gives the ruler or authorities the right to chastise the wicked, even to the extent of using the sword. It was left up to legislators to set the limits of these penalties or chastisements according to the circumstances of the time, the country, the evil-doer, and each particular case. So much for the community chastising the wicked.

On the topic of the chastisement of children, the apostle says, "For what son is there whom a father does not chasten?" (Heb. 12:7). This chastisement is limited to that only which reflects God's compassionate and steadfast love for His children: "For whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives" (Heb. 12:6). The New Testament provides us not with detailed rules, but with basic principles for dealing with children just as God deals with us.

The scholar **Origen** describes a prevailing custom that shows how the chastisement of children was exercised a long time ago: "the custom is practised in the churches of Christ to remove those who are committing obvious trespasses from the common prayer."<sup>994</sup>

Chastisement must be harsher and stricter in proportion to the believer's responsibilities and role in the Church, with no exceptions. Origen says, "For all who are sinners in the church deserve penalties ... to be sure; but each one will be tormented according to the rank they occupy."<sup>995</sup> Origen also says that we must not rush into public chastisements.<sup>996</sup>

### 1302. What is meant by "the right cheek" and "the other cheek" [Matt. 5:39]?

**St. Augustine** says, "this same apostle, if he had kept silence respecting the dignity which he had in the world, when men were persecuting in him the Christian name, would not have presented the other cheek to those that were smiting the right one. For when he said, I am a Roman citizen (Acts 22:25), he was prepared to submit to be despised, in that which he reckoned as least, by those who had despised in him so precious and life-giving a name. For did he at all the less on that account afterwards submit to the chains, which it was not lawful to put on Roman citizens, or did he wish to accuse any one of this injury? And if any spared him on account of the name of Roman citizenship, yet he did not on that account refrain from offering an object they might strike at, since he wished by his patience to cure of so great perversity those whom he saw honouring in him what belonged to the left members rather than the right."<sup>997</sup>

<sup>994</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018): 89 p. 697 (and see PG 13:1740).

<sup>995</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Ezekiel 1–14* 5.4 (ACW 62:82).

<sup>996</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Leviticus 1–16* 3.2.3–4 (FOTC 83:54).

<sup>997</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount* 1.19.58 (NPNF I/6:25) amended.

### 1303. What is St. Ambrose’s stance on self-defense?

For **St. Ambrose**, self-defense is unacceptable because it inevitably destroys the virtue of love, which is also known as godliness, and is thus the virtue that unites the person with God and is the foundation of all other virtues.<sup>998</sup>

### 1304. What is the Christian attitude towards the legal system?

Jews were allowed to enforce the law in their own moral and religious cases, such as the penalty of forty lashes less one.<sup>999</sup> But did they have the right to sentence someone to death? John 18:31 tells us that they were not permitted to pass a death sentence upon anyone. Why, then, were they ready to stone the adulterous woman who was caught in fornication [John 8:3–12]? Did they have the right to carry this out? The scholar **Origen** believes that they were allowed to do so, provided that it was not done in public and that they notified the emperor (or his representative) beforehand.<sup>1000</sup>

And when St. Paul asked for the man who wanted to marry his father’s wife to be tried (1 Cor. 5:1–5), he did not ask that any judgement be brought down upon him bodily, but for a spiritual judgment — that he be excluded from the community for a period of time. There were ecclesiastical trials, too, in the early Church that brought down ecclesiastic judgments under the supervision of the bishop.

### 1305. What is Christian view of judicial rulings against the innocent and the guilty?

**St. Augustine** (354–430 A. D.) believes that neither the judge who imposes the death penalty justly according to the law, nor the person who carries out this sentence, is committing murder.

St. Augustine also treats the conundrum of a Christian judge who sentences an accused person to death, not realizing that the accused is actually innocent and has been treated unjustly, and that the case against him was built on false testimony. He says that so long as the judge was not negligent, did everything possible to find the truth, and bears no personal animosity towards the accused, he bears no blame in this situation, for he did what he had to do. Thus, he should always cry out to God: “From my necessities deliver me” (cf. Ps 25:17).<sup>1001</sup>

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<sup>998</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Discourse on Ps. 118:18:45; On Ps. 36:37*.

<sup>999</sup> Josephus, “Jewish Antiquities” in *The New Complete Works of Josephus*, ed., Paul L. Maier, trans., William Whiston (Kregel Publications, 1999) 4.8.21(238): p. 158; see also Acts 18:14–15; 23:29; 25:19.

<sup>1000</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *A Letter from Origen to Africanus* 14 (ANF 4:392).

<sup>1001</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 19.6 (NPNF I/1:405).



## 10 Social Cohesion

### 1306. What is the Christian understanding of social cohesion?

Collective and individual acts of love are closely linked to spiritual worship. Worship ought to proceed from hearts that are full of love and perform these acts with joy and delight as a living expression of union with God, the Father of all, and of our unity together as members in the one body. Those who perform such acts of love consider them to be something natural emanating from their membership in the family of God, so to speak. The scholar **Tertullian** says, “How much more fittingly they are called and counted brothers who have been led to the knowledge of God as their common Father, who have drunk in one spirit of holiness, who from the same womb of a common ignorance have agonized into the same light of truth! One in mind and soul, we do not hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another.”<sup>1002</sup>

### 1307. What is Christian understanding of charitable organizations?

Some Churches have established charitable institutions that are run by deacons, deaconesses, and widows. **St. Basil the Great** founded many establishments on the outskirts of Caesarea in Cappadocia to receive the strangers and the sick, and especially the outcasts. He also populated these institutions with skilled people to operate them.<sup>1003</sup> In Antioch, the Church established a huge hospital and a house for sojourners. Also, Pachomian monasteries were accustomed to welcoming strangers and to serving the poor and sick in the surrounding villages. And with the support of the state, refuges for the poor were established in Egypt, Palestine, Eastern Greece, Italy, and in Rome itself. Many of the bishops were devoted to social work for the welfare of the whole population and not just Christians.

### 1308. What is the foundation of the social work of the Church?

The Bible was the foundation of the social work of the early Church, and the purpose of this work was to give people a taste of heaven through the experience of love lived out. This social work revolved around the following principles:

- a. Social relationships were governed by the law of brotherly love that is inseparably intertwined with divine love and the fulfilment of justice.
- b. Their main goal was always the common good of all humanity, without neglecting any individual insofar as that was possible.

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<sup>1002</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 39 (ANF 3:46).

<sup>1003</sup> Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* 6.34 (NPNF II/2:371).



- c. They strove for the equality of all human beings, regardless of social situation, and without showing favor to any race, class, or skilled community.
- d. Following on from this sense of equality, every member honored every other member. Honor was to be given where honor is due, but without allowing anyone to be humiliated, regardless of their position or status, whether in society or in the Church.
- e. They revered human freedom and respected every person's individuality, so that every person might express themselves as the Lord Christ's ambassadors and as stewards of heaven, fulfilling that mission for which God created them and saved them.
- f. They consecrated and sanctified every skill and talent, whatever it may be.
- g. The Church was an active Church, with each member playing a positive role in both society and Church, with a disposition of the spirit of faithful leadership, the spirit of humility, and a sense of commitment and responsibility.

### 1309. How can communion be practiced amongst the faithful?

In the Book of Acts we see how the spirit of communion in worship and in possessions dominated the Church in the Apostolic Era. It was founded on the unity of its members together in one body, with each member caring for the others. By the end of the second century, *agape* love-meals began to be conducted after the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy in Rome, Alexandria, Carthage, and in the East. These were supplied from the stores of the church or by a wealthy believer. Also, since there were no such things as hospitals in this period, it fell to the Church to care for the sick.<sup>1004</sup> Charity was not restricted only to the rich helping the poor, but the poor themselves also provided for their needy brothers and sisters. And if there was a poor person amongst them with nothing to offer as alms, he would fast for two or three days to provide the necessary food for his needy brother or sister.<sup>1005</sup>

In briefly describing the ideal bishop, **St. Ignatius** counts as the first requirement that he provides for needs of the poor, especially the widows, of whom he is their protector, after the Lord.<sup>1006</sup>

Social cohesion is also to be found in the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church, and in all her worship. Therefore, we should not marvel that an entire church would gather

<sup>1004</sup> See St. Polycarp of Smyrna, "Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians" in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 6: p. 121 where visiting the sick is listed among the duties of the clergy.

<sup>1005</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* 15 (ANF 9:277).

<sup>1006</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 4 (ANF 1:94-95); Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.16 (ANF 3:371).

together for an all-night vigil to celebrate a victorious martyr, to pray for the departed, or for every member to pray on behalf of the entire community.

Before his martyrdom, **St. Polycarp** felt the need to pray on behalf of everyone: “small and great, known and unknown — as well as the entire world-wide Catholic Church.”<sup>1007</sup> That is why he says, “This is surely the sign of a true and steadfast love, when a man is not bent on saving himself alone, but his brethren as well.”<sup>1008</sup>

Therefore, we do not think of searching for a lost sheep as a good deed we perform for the sake of another, but as something we do for ourselves; for until that soul is restored to the Church, we ourselves are incomplete. When the lost soul returns, peace returns to the Church once more and we are made complete once again. In his discourse about the priest Valens and his wife who left the faith because of greed, St. Polycarp says, “I feel the deepest sorrow for that man and his wife; may the Lord grant them real repentance. You too, for your part, must not be over severe with them, for people of that kind are not to be looked on as enemies; you have to restore them, like parts of your own person that are ailing and going wrong, so that the whole body can be maintained in health. Do this, and you will be promoting your own spiritual welfare at the same time.”<sup>1009</sup>

When he envisions the character of the ideal priest, he focuses on the importance of social service towards the needy, but with a spiritual mindset, as he writes in his epistle: “As for the clergy, they should be men of generous sympathies, with a wide compassion for humanity. It is their business to reclaim the wanderers, keep an eye on all who are infirm, and never neglect the widow, the orphan, or the needy. Their care at all times should be for what is honourable in the sight of God and men [cf. Rom. 12:17; 2 Cor. 8:21]. Any show of ill-temper, partiality, or prejudice is to be scrupulously avoided; and eagerness for money should be a thing utterly alien to them. They must not be over ready to believe ill of anyone, nor too hasty with their censure; being well aware that we all of us owe the debt of sin.”<sup>1010</sup>

The martyr **Cyprian** says, “Before all things, the Teacher of peace and the Master of unity [the Lord Christ] would not have prayer to be made singly and individually, as for one who prays to pray for himself alone. For we say not ‘My Father, who art in heaven,’ nor ‘Give me this day my daily bread,’ ... Our prayer is public and common; and when we pray, we pray not for one, but for the whole people, because we the whole people are one. The God

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<sup>1007</sup> “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 8: p. 127.

<sup>1008</sup> “The Martyrdom of Polycarp” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 1: p. 125.

<sup>1009</sup> Polycarp of Smyrna, “Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 11: p. 123.

<sup>1010</sup> Polycarp of Smyrna, “Epistle of Polycarp to the Philippians” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 6: p. 121.

of peace and the Teacher of concord, who taught unity, willed that one should thus pray for all even as He Himself bore us all in one.”<sup>1011</sup>

In the **Letter to Diognetus** we read, “Any Christian is free to share his neighbour’s table, but never his marriage-bed.”<sup>1012</sup> **Minucius** also says that Christians “love one another almost before they know one another.”<sup>1013</sup>

**Aristides** says, “From widows Christians do not turn away their esteem; and they deliver the orphan from him who treats him harshly. And he, who has, gives to him who has not, without boasting. And when they see a stranger, they take him in to their homes and rejoice over him as a very brother ... And whenever one of their poor passes from the world, each one of them according to his ability gives heed to him and carefully sees to his burial. And if they hear that one of their number is imprisoned or afflicted on account of the name of their Messiah, all of them anxiously minister to his necessity, and if it is possible to redeem him they set him free.”<sup>1014</sup>

And **St. Clement of Rome** says, “It is comely and useful, that a man ‘visit orphans and widows’ (James 1:27), and especially those poor persons who have many children.”<sup>1015</sup>

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<sup>1011</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4: On the Lord’s Prayer* 8 (ANF 5:449) amended.

<sup>1012</sup> “Epistle to Diognetus,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 5: p. 145.

<sup>1013</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 9 (ANF 4:177).

<sup>1014</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* 15 (ANF 9:276–277).

<sup>1015</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *Two Epistles Concerning Virginity* 1.12 (ANF 8:159).

# 11

## Christian Faith and Social Class

### 1310. How did Christianity promote mutual respect among all social classes?

The coming of our Lord Christ changed our mindsets. We have come to identify ourselves by our spiritual birth, and not by the social class to which we belong, and to always fulfill our imperative to edify all social groups for the common good of all.

**First:** Christian masters and servants together shared the blessing of martyrdom. The acts of the martyrs present us with many living examples of noble, wise, and wealthy individuals who accepted the Christian faith, and did not just give alms to the poor in abundance, but also joyfully gave their very lives as sacrifices for the faith. We also find masters who were martyred together with their menservants and maidservants. Thus, servants became heroes; honored and cherished by the Church regardless of their social class.

**Second:** Christians of different social classes intermarried. For example, Callistus, the bishop of Rome (217–223 A. D.) approved the marriage of an aristocratic Christian lady to a Christian man who belonged to a lower social class; despite it being forbidden under Roman law.

**Third:** Our Messiah united us all in Him. In response to the pagan philosopher Celsus who belittled the Lord Christ by calling Him a beggar who gathered people of bad reputation around Him, such as tax collectors and sinners, and wandered the land in search of food amidst much poverty and shame, Origen writes, “our Jesus, who is reproached with being born in a village ... and being despised as the son of a poor laboring woman, and as having on account of his poverty left his native country and hired himself out in Egypt ... has yet been able to shake the whole inhabited world not only to a degree far above what Themistocles the Athenian ever did, but beyond what even Pythagoras, or Plato, or any other wise man in any part of the world whatever, or any prince or general, ever succeeded in doing.”<sup>1016</sup>

**Fourth:** As Christians, we glory in the fact that many of us are poor in terms of temporal possessions. **Minucius Felix** says, “But that many of us are called poor, this is not our disgrace, but our glory; for as our mind is relaxed by luxury, so it is strengthened by frugality. And yet who can be poor if he does not want, if he does not crave for the possessions of others, if he is rich towards God? He rather is poor, who, although he has much, desires more ... Blessed is he in this journey of life who lifts himself along in poverty, and does not breathe heavily under the burden of riches.”<sup>1017</sup>

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<sup>1016</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 1.29 (ANF 4:409).

<sup>1017</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 36 (ANF 4:195).

“Are you a king? Yet you fear as much as you are feared; and however you may be surrounded with abundant followers, yet you are alone in the presence of danger. Are you rich? But fortune is ill trusted; and with a large travelling equipage the brief journey of life is not furnished, but burdened. Do you boast of the fasces and the magisterial robes? It is a vain mistake of man, and an empty worship of dignity, to glitter in purple and to be sordid in mind. Are you elevated by nobility of birth? Do you praise your parents? Yet we are all born with one lot; it is only by virtue that we are distinguished.”<sup>1018</sup>

**Fifth:** Christians make friends with everyone, not just those of a particular social class. **St. Augustine** says, “friendship is not confined by narrow limits; it includes all those to whom love and affection are due, although it goes out more readily to some, more slowly to others, but it reaches even our enemies, for whom we are commanded to pray. Thus, there is no one in the human race to whom love is not due, either as a return of mutual affection or in virtue of his share in our common nature.”<sup>1019</sup>

### 1311. Do believers carry on their own individual work?

The scholar **Tertullian** responds in some detail to the accusation that Christians are lazy and unproductive.<sup>1020</sup> He affirms that Christians participate in every kind of work just as pagans do, and that Christians do not despise any profession so long as it does not corrupt the spiritual life. He says, “We do not forget the debt of gratitude we owe to God, our Lord and Creator; we reject no creature of His hands, though certainly we exercise restraint upon ourselves, lest of any gift of His we make an immoderate or sinful use. So we sojourn with you in the world, abjuring neither forum, nor shambles, nor bath, nor booth, nor workshop, nor inn, nor weekly market, nor any other places of commerce. We sail with you, and fight with you, and till the ground with you, even in the various arts we make public property of our works for your benefit.”<sup>1021</sup>

The **Didache** says, “Everyone who comes ‘in the Name of the Lord’ is to be made welcome, though later on you must test him and find out about him. You will be able to distinguish the true from the false. If the newcomer is only passing through, give him all the help you can — though he is not to stay more than a couple of days with you, or three if it is unavoidable. But if he wants to settle down among you, and is a skilled worker, let him find employment and earn his bread [cf. 2 Thess. 3:10]. If he knows no trade, use your discretion to make sure that he does not live in idleness simply on the strength of being a Christian (cf.

<sup>1018</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 37 (ANF 4:196).

<sup>1019</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 130 (FOTC 18:386).

<sup>1020</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 42 (ANF 3:49).

<sup>1021</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 42 (ANF 3:49).

Matt. 12:31). Unless he agrees to this, he is only trying to exploit Christ [cf. 1 Tim. 6:5]. You must be on your guard against men of that sort.”<sup>1022</sup>

**Origen** says, “No one is slow in the house of the wise man.”<sup>1023</sup> **St. Clement of Rome** also writes in a letter that is attributed to him, “Let us consider, in the fear of God, the manner of life of these holy men. Lo! We find it written concerning Moses and Aaron, that they acted and lived in the company of men, who themselves also followed a course of conduct like theirs. And thus did Joshua also, the son of Nun.”<sup>1024</sup> **St. Clement of Alexandria** believes that if one labors only to become rich, he does not labor for a Christian goal.<sup>1025</sup>

And the **Didache** asks priests to dedicate themselves to their service, saying they have the right to be supported from that service, just as any manual laborer supports himself by his work.<sup>1026</sup>

### 1312. Was labor toilsome before the fall of Adam and Eve?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “In the beginning, God gave us a life free from cares and exempt from toil. We did not rightly make use of the gift, but perverted our leisure and lost paradise. Therefore, He made our life thereafter a toilsome one ... laziness has been active in corrupting us and causing us much trouble ... If man had toiled from the beginning, He would not have inflicted toil as a punishment afterward. It is indeed possible both to work and at the same time not to labor hard, as is the case with the angels.”<sup>1027</sup>

### 1313. Must a Christian work for the sake of others?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Say not, ‘It is impossible for me to induce others (to become Christians)’—for if you are a Christian, it is impossible but that it should be so ... Do not insult God. To say, that the sun cannot shine, would be to insult Him: to say that a Christian cannot do good, is to insult God, and call Him a liar. For it is easier for the sun not to give heat, nor to shine, than for the Christian not to send forth light: it is easier for the light to be darkness, than for this to be so ... Nothing is more frigid than a Christian, who cares not for the salvation of others. You cannot here plead poverty: for she that cast down the two mites, shall be your accuser (Luke 21:1). And Peter said, ‘Silver and gold have I none’ (Acts 3:6). And Paul was so poor, that he often hungered, and wanted necessary food. You cannot plead lowness of birth: for they too were ignoble men, and of ignoble parents. You cannot allege

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<sup>1022</sup> “The Didache” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 12: p. 196.

<sup>1023</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis* 4.1 (FOTC 71:104).

<sup>1024</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *Two Epistles on Virginitly* 2.14 (ANF 8:65).

<sup>1025</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 1.12 (ANF 2:234–235).

<sup>1026</sup> “The Didache” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 13: p. 196.

<sup>1027</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 36 (FOTC 33:355, 357, 358).

want of education: for they too were unlearned men (Acts 4:13). Even if you be a slave therefore and a runaway slave, you can perform your part: for such was Onesimus ... You cannot plead infirmity: for such was Timothy, having often infirmities.”<sup>1028</sup>

### 1314. Are there certain occupations from which Christians are prohibited?

**St. Ignatius**<sup>1029</sup> counsels Christians to avoid evil arts or occupations, such as: working as a pagan priest; preparing the sacrifices for pagan worship; manufacturing pagan idols; selling poisons; or engaging in magic or fortune telling, and so on. The scholar **Tertullian** also warns against lying and cheating in commerce and using oaths in commercial dealings.<sup>1030</sup> Some also considered the sculpture of any kind of statue as wrong, based on Exodus 20:4.<sup>1031</sup>

God, who bestowed all these capabilities upon Adam, did not place him in the Garden of Eden to merely eat, drink, and sleep, but also to work in the garden. Work is holy and confers upon humanity a kind of contentment and a sense of purpose and productivity. We know that the Lord Christ was a carpenter (Mark 6:3) and the apostle Paul was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). Among the parables of the Lord Christ, we find a man who was unable to find work but was ashamed to beg (Luke 16:3). The apostle Paul boasted that he was able to support himself and those who were with him through his profession (Acts 20:34–35). In his letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:8–13), he explains that he labored with his own hands. The **Didascalia** says, “in all the conduct of your life you may either be occupied in the things of the Lord or engaged upon your work, and may never be idle.”<sup>1032</sup>

### 1315. Why did St. John Chrysostom rebuke the wealthy?

He often criticized them not because they were wealthy, but because of their laziness and idleness. When he spoke of the poor, he meant those who work hard, praising them not for their poverty, but for their hard toil at their jobs, and for supporting themselves by the work of their hands and improving the lot of their families. St. John Chrysostom says, “For if poverty were taken away, the whole order of life would be abolished, and every mode of living would be disturbed: there would be neither a sailor nor a governor, nor a farmer, nor a cement-maker, nor a weaver, nor a tailor, nor a carpenter, nor a blacksmith, nor a tanner, nor a baker, nor any other workman ... if all were rich, all would also live in idleness, and thus everything would be lost and corrupted.”<sup>1033</sup>

<sup>1028</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Acts of the Apostles* 20 (NPNF I/11:133–134; 133) amended.

<sup>1029</sup> St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to Polycarp* 5 (ANF 1:95); cf. Tertullian, *Apology*, 43 (ANF 3:49).

<sup>1030</sup> Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 11 (ANF 3:67–68).

<sup>1031</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 4 (ANF 2:184ff).

<sup>1032</sup> *Didascalia Apostolorum: Syriac Version Translated*, trans., R. Hugh Connelly (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929) 13: p. 129.

<sup>1033</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *On Hannah (De Anna)* 5.3 (PG 54: 673).

### 1316. What attracted slaves and captives to the early Church?

It was a widespread custom in the ancient world for a person to sell himself or his children to escape from abject poverty. Victorious armies would also sell off captives taken in war as slaves, whether to the rich of their own land or of neighboring lands. Given the prevalence of the slave economy, the Church could not remain passive towards the practice, although it lacked the temporal power to issue direct orders to free slaves.

The Law of the Old Testament contains commandments that prevent masters from perpetrating violence and abuse upon their slaves, especially those of their own race; not as an endorsement of the existing system, but rather as a preliminary step towards seeing slaves as human beings and brethren.

The New Testament highlights its concern for slaves in the following ways:

**First:** It asks masters to show compassion towards their enslaved brothers and sisters, as fellow heirs of the eternal inheritance.

**Second:** It insists that believing slaves have an effective mission to win their masters — even the abusive ones — to the faith, through their obedience in the Lord and sincere love, and not by coercion. In his letter, the apostle Paul addresses Philemon about his slave Onesimus, who was a thief and a fugitive slave. He says, “I have begotten him while in my chains ... receive him, that is, my own heart” (Philem. 10–12). In so saying, the apostle Paul furnishes us with a practical example of the liberation of slaves — not through violent revolt or conflict, but through the spirit of unity and love, and through shared fellowship in the new heavenly life.

**Third:** The Church Fathers believed that God created every person to be free, including St. Ambrose,<sup>1034</sup> St. John Chrysostom,<sup>1035</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa,<sup>1036</sup> and St. Basil the Great.<sup>1037</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria and the scholar Origen are considered among the foremost defenders of slaves. St. Jerome<sup>1038</sup> and the scholar Tertullian<sup>1039</sup> wrote against slaves rebelling.

**Fourth:** The School of Alexandria began as a school for catechumens,<sup>1040</sup> where those who wanted to be baptized — whether Jews or Gentiles — were welcome to study the Christian faith regardless of religion, culture, social position, or age. Education there did not

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<sup>1034</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Letters 1–91* 25 (FOTC 26:132–134).

<sup>1035</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 22 (NPNF I/13:157–163).

<sup>1036</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed., Stuart George Hall, trans., Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993) 4: pp. 73–75.

<sup>1037</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 20, 51 (PP 42:87–89).

<sup>1038</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 107.8 (NPNF II/6:193).

<sup>1039</sup> Tertullian, *Apology* 27 (ANF 3:40–41).

<sup>1040</sup> The word “catechumen” is derived from the Greek word κατεχούμενος (*katēchoumenos*), which means “being taught,” and the verb means “learning verbally.” It was used in the Church to refer to candidates for baptism.



distinguish between slaves or masters; it was not the exclusive preserve of any social class,<sup>1041</sup> at a time when slaves were cheap, bought and sold as a commodity.

Indeed, in the time of Athenagoras, there were wealthy Christians in the Church of Alexandria who owned slaves, while there were others who were poor. However, according to Athenagoras, not one of these slaves ever raised the complaint against their masters that their rights had been denied, even under pressure of torture. Around the same time, the Council of Gangra directed slaves to submit to their masters in the Lord, that they might bear witness to the gospel living within them, and to refrain from trying to escape from their masters and from using violence against them. “If any one shall teach a slave, under pretext of piety, to despise his master and to run away from his service, and not to serve his own master with good-will and all honor, let him be anathema.”<sup>1042</sup>

**Fifth:** It teaches us to pray for the sake of captive slaves. The writings of the Apostolic Fathers<sup>1043</sup> and the texts of some ancient liturgies testify to the early Church’s concern from the earliest of times for captives, those enslaved in mines, and those in prison. **St. Justin Martyr**<sup>1044</sup> describes a collection of gifts after the liturgy for five groups of people, including those in chains. **Aristides**<sup>1045</sup> indicates that among the Christian virtues is the treatment of slaves as brothers and sisters, and that Christians collaborate to free prisoners for the sake of the name of Jesus Christ. The scholar **Tertullian** describes a monthly collection of donations which the faithful distributed, among others, to elderly slaves, and to those in the mines, in exile, or in prison. We find a similar account in the **Didascalia**. And **St. Clement of Rome** prays saying, “Grant us, O Lord, we beseech you, your help and protection [cf. Ps. 119:114]. Deliver the afflicted ... ransom the captive, support the weak, comfort the fainthearted.”<sup>1046</sup>

**Sixth:** It teaches us to strive to liberate captives. **St. Cyprian** sent 100,000 sesterces (an ancient Roman coin) to the churches of Numidia to redeem Christians who had been captured by certain barbarian tribes.<sup>1047</sup> The historian **Eusebius** quotes passages from the letter of Dionysius the bishop of Corinth to the Romans, addressed to Soter the Bishop of Rome at that time, saying, “For from the beginning it has been your practice to do good to all the brethren in various ways, and to send contributions to many churches in every city. Thus relieving the want of the needy, and making provision for the brethren in the mines by the gifts which you have sent from the beginning, you Romans keep up the hereditary customs of the Romans, which your blessed bishop Soter has not only maintained, but also added to,

<sup>1041</sup> See Makary el-Souriany, *Ancient and Contemporary Christian Education in the Coptic Church of Egypt: MRE Thesis* (Princeton Theological Seminary, 1955): p. 78.

<sup>1042</sup> *Canons of the Council of Gangra* 3 (NPNF II/14:93).

<sup>1043</sup> Cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Smyrnaeans* 6 (ANF 1:88–89) and *Epistle to Polycarp* 4 (ANF 1:94–95); and *Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)* 8 (ANF 2:25).

<sup>1044</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 67 (ANF 1:185–186).

<sup>1045</sup> Aristides, *The Apology of Aristides the Philosopher* 15 (ANF 9:276–277).

<sup>1046</sup> “The First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians,” in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 59: pp. 47–48 amended.

<sup>1047</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles* 62.4 (ANF 5:359).

furnishing an abundance of supplies to the saints, and encouraging the brethren from abroad with blessed words, as a loving father his children.”<sup>1048</sup>

Seeing the keen desire of the Church to buy slaves in order to set them free, in 331 A. D. Constantine granted the Church the right to liberate slaves via special procedures conducted within the church building that were in full accordance with all the requirements of civil law. He also granted the Church the power to provide sanctuary to escaped slaves. **St. Clement of Rome** says, “We know many among ourselves who have given themselves up to bonds, in order that they might ransom others. Many, too, have surrendered themselves to slavery, that with the price which they received for themselves, they might provide food for others.”<sup>1049</sup>

### 1317. What do the Church Fathers say about slavery?

**St. John Chrysostom** rebukes wealthy Christians who owned thousands of slaves.<sup>1050</sup> In his view, a Christian might have one or two slaves to serve his household but must never demean them.<sup>1051</sup> He makes it clear that slavery was never in God’s original plan<sup>1052</sup> and encourages Christians to help their slaves to learn a trade so that they might work and liberate themselves from slavery. **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** declares that slavery is a sin that is nonetheless a part of the reality of life.<sup>1053</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says that no one is a slave by nature. But at the same time, he does not call for the existing social order to be overturned. He says, “So, even if one is master and the other slave, nevertheless all men are fellow slaves in respect of their equality in honor toward each other and insofar as all are the possessions of our maker.”<sup>1054</sup>

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** was the first theologian to initiate an intellectual revolution against slavery. In his fourth homily on Ecclesiastes,<sup>1055</sup> he provides a theological foundation for his opposition to slavery, which we can summarize in the following points:

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<sup>1048</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 4.23.10 (NPNF II/1:201).

<sup>1049</sup> St. Clement of Rome, *First Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* 55 (ANF 1:19–20). History never recorded such generosity amongst pagans, but perhaps St. Clement wished to focus on examples of such love amongst Christians, as suggested by his phrase: “among ourselves.” And this actually happened in the case of Peter, one of the Alexandrian nobles, who sold himself as a slave to provide for the needy (cf. the story of the ascetic slave).

<sup>1050</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 63.4 (NPNF I/10:372–373).

<sup>1051</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 40.5 (NPNF I/12:247).

<sup>1052</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 40.5 (NPNF I/12:247); St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 22 (NPNF I/13:158–159).

<sup>1053</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Concerning His Own Life* 80–82 (FOTC 75:27).

<sup>1054</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 20.51 (PP 42:88).

<sup>1055</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed., Stuart George Hall, trans., Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993) 4: pp. 73–75.

- Let no one think that he is master over his own species, nor count himself to be different to those under him.
- God created human nature to be free and every individual has the right to make his own decisions.
- We must distinguish between irrational beings on the one hand, and the free and rational being who is the image and likeness of God on the other.
- It is impossible to be master over the free image of God; thus, no one can put a price on another person.
- Who are you to presume that you can be master over a human being?

**1318. On what foundations was the revolution begun by St. Gregory of Nyssa built?**

**First:** We are all equal by nature.<sup>1056</sup>

**Second:** God alone is Master of all: “what is such a gross example of arrogance ... [as a master] regarding himself as something different from his subordinates?”<sup>1057</sup>

**Third:** Human beings are free by nature: “‘I got me slaves and slave girls’ he says ... This kind of language is raised up as a challenge to God ... You have forgotten the limits of your authority and that your rule is confined to control over things without reason.”<sup>1058</sup>

**Fourth:** What price can one put on a human slave? “How many obols [a currency] did you reckon the equivalent of the likeness of God?”<sup>1059</sup>

**Fifth:** Is not a slave sold with all his possessions? Yet God gave humanity possession of the whole world. Can you put a price on the whole world?

**Sixth:** How can a contract—a mere scrap of paper—possibly give one person any kind of real possession of another?

**Seventh:** The difference between a master and a slave is only a difference in title, and nothing more.

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<sup>1056</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on the Beatitudes*, ed., Hubertus R. Drobner and Albert Viciano, trans., Stuart George Hall (Leiden, Boston, Kohn: Brill, 2000) 1.2, 7; 4.2: p. 24, 30, 49.

<sup>1057</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed., Stuart George Hall, trans., Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993) 4: p. 73.

<sup>1058</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed., Stuart George Hall, trans., Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993) 4: p. 73.

<sup>1059</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed., Stuart George Hall, trans., Stuart George Hall and Rachel Moriarty (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co., 1993) 4: p. 74.

**Eighth:** He called for masters to free their slaves on the glorious Feast of the Resurrection, just as the Lord Christ, through His resurrection, liberated us from the bondage of sin.

In another discourse, St. Gregory says that a Christian community ought to practice equality; and therefore, slavery and every kind of injustice have no place in the community of the Church: “We are neither slaves nor lords; we do not suffer from poverty, are not wealthy due to a noble birth, nor are we humble because of a lowly birth. We do not have honor from exercising authority nor do life’s vicissitudes afflict us ... Here freedom of speech and equality under the law are the common heritage of all who sincerely desire peace and who freely choose it.”<sup>1060</sup>

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<sup>1060</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Concerning Those Who Have Died* J.35; J.37: pp. 16, 17.



## 12

### Christian Faith and Liberty

#### **1319. Did God grant free will to all rational creatures, both the heavenly and the earthly?**

God granted both the heavenly hosts and humanity perfectly free will, and thus all rational creatures are responsible for their actions. But the devil, unlike humans, was created without flesh, so when he fell into pride he was condemned forever. Had he not sinned, he would have continued forever to live like the righteous angels. But Adam had a mortal body and when he sinned, he was condemned to death; although not forever, because humanity was destined for life and eternity. Humans have a dynamism that motivates them to do what is good and to seek immortality; and as a consequence, they have a yearning for the good they have lost.

An angel's will is fixed upon good or evil; so having made a free choice initially, a fallen angel can no longer will anything but evil and is incapable of even desiring anything else. But the human will continues to be capable of choosing between good and evil. With his first free act, Adam chose death; but through divine love and his intrinsic potential for immortality, he was able to regain the condition he had lost, through his acceptance and responsiveness to the grace of God and the plan of God for salvation.

Humans differ from angels in that humans are destined for immortality. The path of salvation lies open before them — if they freely will to follow it, they have the right to enjoy immortality. In this way, God did not abandon His image to decay and destruction, but rather offered it His divine grace which is able to restore it to immortality. On the other hand, the devil fell because of his pride, which only increased after his fall, and he insisted on sin and on resisting God; whereas man fell by the deceit of the devil.

**St. Jacob of Sarug** pictures Adam's condition after his fall, saying, "The deceiver envied him and sowed in him a seed filled with death, and he began to think that he is the source of his own glory. He supposed that his glory came from himself and not from another. He said in himself, 'The fruit of that tree is mine, I am the master; who can compel me to follow His command? There is no other king over creation but me.' He desired it so much that he forgot God. This is the fruit that grants death to everyone who eats of it. With the same thought that made the devil fall, the head of the [human] race was destroyed from the beginning. He sowed the seed containing the thought filled with death, and with it he killed the mighty who was filled with beauty. But He [God] had compassion on him with His mercies, He who is kind and full of goodness. And He took away from him the glory with which He had clothed him, and undressed him of the robe of this glory, so that he would not boast and completely perish like Satan. When He cast him down from his position, He placed lowliness before him: 'You are contemptible dust and mud, and the son of dust. Why do you seek to seize a rank that is

not for you? You have not created all creation, and it is not for you ... You are dust, so do not ask for greatness! Mud you are, so why do you stomp your feet on things that are not yours? ... You are dust; so because you lusted, to dust you shall return.”

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “To the rational nature, however, he gave the grace of self-determination and added a capacity to detect what fits one’s purposes. In this way space might be made for our responsibility, and the good should not be compelled and involuntary but come about as the product of choice. Since the impulse of self-determination unavoidably leads us toward the apparent good, there was found in the order of Being one agent who used this power wrongly and, according to the word of the apostle, became the “inventor of mischief” (Rom. 1:30).”<sup>1061</sup> Therefore, our Creator grants us free will to return to Him and follow Him. By taking flesh and dwelling among us, He sanctified the will granted to us.

**St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “He did not rebuke them when they went away, nor even severely threaten them; but rather, turning to His apostles, He said, ‘Will you also go away?’ (John 6:67) manifestly observing the law whereby a man left to his own liberty, and established in his own choice, himself desires for himself either death or salvation.”<sup>1062</sup>

And **St. Jerome** affirms the sanctification of free will that was granted to us that we might walk in Christ Jesus, saying, “He does not say, you must drink, you must run, willing or unwilling: but whoever is willing and able to run and to drink, he shall conquer, he shall be satisfied.”<sup>1063</sup>

**1320. Why should we ask God for help instead of striving for victory over temptations ourselves, if we can do all things? Why should we strive to live in righteousness when the ability to do so rests only in God’s hands?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Only let no one dare to defend the freedom of the will in any such way as to attempt depriving us of the prayer that says, ‘Lead us not into temptation’; and, on the other hand, let no one deny the freedom of the will, and so venture to find an excuse for sin. But let us give heed to the Lord, both in commanding and in offering His aid; in both telling us our duty, and assisting us to discharge it. For some He has let be lifted up to pride through an overweening trust in their own wills, while others He has let fall into carelessness through a contrary excess of distrust ... For, on the one side, we have to give Him thanks that the power is bestowed; and on the other, to pray that our own little strength may not utterly fail. It is this very faith that works by love (Gal. 5:6), according to the

<sup>1061</sup> *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 2: p. 61.

<sup>1062</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles* 54.7 (ANF 5:341) amended.

<sup>1063</sup> St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 1.12 (NPNF II/6:355).

measure thereof that the Lord has given to every man (Rom. 12:3); that he that glories may glory, not in himself, but in the Lord (1 Cor. 1:31).”<sup>1064</sup>

**1321. What is the relationship between free will and the kingdom of God that is within us through divine grace?**

**St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “‘For behold! The kingdom of God is within you.’ For ask not, He says, about the times in which the season of the kingdom of heaven shall again arise and come [Luke 17:20–36]: but rather be in earnest, that you may be found worthy of it, for ‘it is within you,’ that is, it depends upon your own wills, and is in your own power, whether or not you receive it. For every man who has attained to justification by means of faith in Christ, and is adorned by all virtue, is counted worthy of the kingdom of heavens.”<sup>1065</sup>

**1322. What is the role of divine grace in sanctifying the will and opposing the role of the devil in corrupting it?**

**St. Jerome** says, “Let us ask a question of the heretics, who claim that there are two mutually opposed natures [of souls]. If in accordance with their understanding, a good tree can never produce evil fruit [even if it deviates], how is it that Moses, who was a good tree, sinned at the water of contradiction (cf. Deut. 32:51)? How is it that ... Peter too, at the Lord’s Passion, denied Him, saying: ‘I do not know the man’ (Matt. 26:72). Or with what consistency did Jethro, the father-in-law of Moses, an evil tree who assuredly did not even believe in the God of Israel, give good counsel to Moses (Ex. 18:19)?”<sup>1066</sup>

**1323. What is the ‘steering wheel’ that pilots the human will?**

A spiritual person surrenders his will to the Spirit of God to guide it, whereas a carnal person employs it to fulfill his desires and bodily lusts. And a natural person ignores the grace of God and thinks he is able to govern all his inner energies and external actions as he wills. The spiritual person is he who is fervent in his worship and aflame with God’s love. The carnal person is he who has obvious weaknesses in his life from which he is unable to escape. The natural person is he who is lukewarm and who considers himself as not needing the grace of God and His support. He is a person who is beguiled by cultivating certain personas, such as appearing to know the Holy Bible inside out, or being an influential preacher who is capable of moving the hearts of many, or smugly being a monk — or he has a certain perceptions about worship or service, but he does not live a repentant life with a contrite heart

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<sup>1064</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 53.8 (NPNF I/7:293–294) amended.

<sup>1065</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 117: p. 542–543 amended.

<sup>1066</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* 1.7.18 (FOTC 117:95).



or experience a relationship with the Lord. This type is dangerous because his outside appearance deceives others as well as himself.

**Abba Daniel** says, “There are, according to the statements of Scripture, three kinds of souls; the first is the carnal, the second the natural, and the third the spiritual: which we find are thus described by the Apostle. For of the carnal he says: I gave you milk to drink, not meat: for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able; for you are yet carnal. And again: For whereas there is among you envying and contention, are you not carnal? (1 Cor. 3:2–3). Concerning the natural he also speaks as follows: But the natural man perceives not the things that are of the spirit of God; for it is foolishness to him. But concerning the spiritual: But the spiritual man judges all things: and he himself is judged by no man (1 Cor. 2:14–15). And again You who are spiritual instruct such ones in the spirit of meekness (Gal. 6:1).”<sup>1067</sup>

**St. Anthony** says, “Regard as free not those whose status makes them outwardly free, but those who are free in their character and conduct. . . . Freedom and happiness of soul consist in genuine purity and detachment from transitory things.”<sup>1068</sup> And also, “A man is free if he is not a slave to sensual pleasures, but through good judgment and self-restraint masters the body and with true gratitude is satisfied with what God gives him, even though it is quite scanty.”<sup>1069</sup>

### 1324. Why does St. Clement of Alexandria criticize paganism?

He criticizes it because it corrupts human freedom in one way or another. For example, he speaks of Orpheus and how through his songs, he corrupted the “noble freedom of those who lived as free citizens under heaven” and enslaved people to demonic magic and prattling.<sup>1070</sup> St. Clement allegorically interprets Christ’s invitation to every believer to leave his father and mother to follow Him; for the believer leaves the world behind, namely his mother, and abandons his father, namely the civil laws that are against the faith, for the sake of God’s friendship and to be at the right-hand of the altar.<sup>1071</sup> Thus, he enjoys the free will to choose whatever is best for him.

<sup>1067</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 4.19 (NPNF II/11:336–337).

<sup>1068</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and the Virtuous Life: One Hundred and Seventy Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*. Trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979): p. 332.

<sup>1069</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and the Virtuous Life: One Hundred and Seventy Texts,” in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*. Trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979): p. 337.

<sup>1070</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 3 (ANF 2:183–184).

<sup>1071</sup> Cf. St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.15 (ANF 2:426–427).

### 1325. Why does the believer accept martyrdom with joy?

The believer cherishes his free will that enables him to follow the Lord Christ and to be His disciple with complete liberty, even if the price for doing this is martyrdom. **Minucius Felix** believes that joyfully accepting martyrdom and courageously facing death is “an assertion of our true liberty.”<sup>1072</sup> He says, “How beautiful is the spectacle to God when a Christian does battle with pain; when he is drawn up against threats, and punishments, and tortures; when, mocking the noise of death, he treads under foot the horror of the executioner; when he raises up his liberty against kings and princes, and yields to God alone, whose he is; when, triumphant and victorious, he tramples upon the very man who has pronounced sentence against him!”<sup>1073</sup>

And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “the free man, though threatened with death at a tyrant’s hands, and brought before the tribunals, and all his substances imperilled, will by no means abandon piety or ever fail in holding nobly to virtue.”<sup>1074</sup>

### 1326. What is the role of free will in a person’s life?

Christians who, like Athenagoras, place the Creator at the center of their philosophy, affirm the importance of the person and of free will.<sup>1075</sup> This freedom holds us accountable, and responsible for every action we do. If a person falls into evil, he will be judged and delivered into everlasting fire, for his soul cannot perish; but if he clings to God, he will live a heavenly eternal life.

### 1327. Is free will a gift or a responsibility?

Free will is a precious divine gift and at the same time an obligation upon us to ensure that we preserve the free will of those who are subject to us, whether they be family members or subordinates at work or servants. We pay back God’s gift to us through those with whom we interact.

**St. Augustine** believes that even in the circumstances of a slave economy, a believer must never be beguiled by his legal right to command his slaves; but rather, as a kind of fatherhood or motherhood, he must feel that he is himself responsible to care for every aspect of his slaves’ lives: spiritual, financial, and psychological. Owning a slave is not about one person living at ease at the expense of another person — the master takes on the responsibility of caring for his slave who is also his brother, and in this way, the master is also the servant of his slave.

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<sup>1072</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 38 (ANF 4:197).

<sup>1073</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 37 (ANF 4:196).

<sup>1074</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 4.8 (ANF 2:421) amended.

<sup>1075</sup> Cf. Athenagoras, *A Plea for the Christians* 4, 11–12 (ANF 2:131, 134).

**St. Augustine** says, “Even those who rule serve those whom they seem to command; for they rule not from a love of power, but from a sense of the duty they owe to others — not because they are proud of authority, but because they love mercy.”<sup>1076</sup>

And further, “Since, then, the house ought to be the beginning or element of the city, and every beginning bears reference to some end of its own kind, and every element to the integrity of the whole of which it is an element, it follows plainly enough that domestic peace has a relation to civic peace — in other words, that the well-ordered concord of domestic obedience and domestic rule has a relation to the well-ordered concord of civic obedience and civic rule. And therefore it follows, further, that the father of the family ought to frame his domestic rule in accordance with the law of the city, so that the household may be in harmony with the civic order.”<sup>1077</sup>

“And [St. Paul] adds another passage from the from the Epistle to Philemon, where, speaking of Onesimus, [St. Paul] says: ‘Whom I would have retained with me, that in your stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel. But without your mind would I do nothing; that your benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly’ (Philem. 13–14). Likewise, in Deuteronomy: ‘Life and death has He set before you, and good and evil: choose life, that you may live’ (Deut. 30:15, 19). So in the book of Solomon: ‘God from the beginning made man, and left him in the hand of His counsel; and He added for him commandments and precepts: if you will—to perform acceptable faithfulness for the time to come, they shall save you. He has set fire and water before you: stretch forth your hand unto where you will. Before man are good and evil, and life and death; poverty and honour are from the Lord God’ (Sir. 15:14–17). So again in Isaiah we read: ‘If you be willing, and hearken unto me, you shall eat the good of the land; but if you be not willing, and hearken not to me, the sword shall devour you: for the mouth of the Lord has spoken this’ (Isa. 1:19–20) ... Not that the result is without our will, but that our will does not accomplish the result, unless it receive the divine assistance.”<sup>1078</sup>

**1328. What is the meaning of “It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy” (Rom. 9:16)?**

**St. Jerome** says, “Realize what that means: There is question not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God showing mercy. If we neither will nor run, however, God will not come to help us. It is ours to will and to run, then, He will take pity on us. While the athlete sleeps, he loses the victory.”<sup>1079</sup>

<sup>1076</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 19.14 (NPNF I/2:411).

<sup>1077</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 19.16 (NPNF I/2:412).

<sup>1078</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on Man’s Perfection in Righteousness* 19 (NPNF I/5:174) amended.

<sup>1079</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 34 (FOTC 48:252).

### 1329. How do faith and divine grace relate to free will?

**St. Jerome** says, “For our parts we gladly embrace this freedom, but we never forget to thank the Giver; knowing that we are powerless unless He continually preserves in us His own gift ... To will and to run are mine, but they will cease to be mine unless God brings me His continual aid. ... And in the Gospel the Saviour says: ‘my Father works hitherto and I work’ (John 5:17). He is always a giver, always a bestower. It is not enough for me that He has given me grace once; He must give it me always. I seek that I may obtain, and when I have obtained I seek again. I am covetous of God’s bounty; and as He is never slack in giving, so I am never weary in receiving. The more I drink, the more I thirst. For I have read the song of the psalmist: ‘O taste and see that the Lord is good’ (Ps. 34:8). Every good thing that we have is a tasting of the Lord.”<sup>1080</sup>

He also says, “Now where there is grace, this is not given in return for works but is the free gift of the giver ... And yet it is ours to will and not to will; and all the while the very liberty that is ours is only ours by the mercy of God.”<sup>1081</sup>

When **St. Clement of Alexandria** discusses faith and human freedom, he points out that both human freedom and human intellect are divine gifts that cannot bring a person into a life of communion without divine aid. While faith is the product of free will, it is also a gift from God.<sup>1082</sup> This resembles a football player who is free to kick the ball or to refuse to do so, but he cannot make this choice at all unless the ball is passed to him in the first place.<sup>1083</sup> Likewise, we can embrace faith or reject it, but we need the hand of God to offer it to us in the first place.

This same line of thought is taken up by his disciple, **Origen**, who discusses in detail the free grace of God, saying, “I can hardly convince myself that there could be any work which would demand from God repayment as something due. For even the fact that we are able to do anything at all, to think and to speak, we do through his gift and generosity.”<sup>1084</sup> At the same time, he emphasizes, “If you take away the spontaneity of virtue, you destroy its essence.”<sup>1085</sup>

### 1330. Does being a servant of God constrain free will?

We exercise our freedom not out of necessity, but through love “from the heart” with all our will. Freedom in Christ means being a slave to righteousness (Rom. 6:18), although this is a slavery that comes from voluntary love, and not because we are forcefully coerced. Our slavery is maturity and obligation without negligence or carelessness. **St. Augustine** says,

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<sup>1080</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 133.6 (NPNF II/6:276) amended.

<sup>1081</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 130.12 (NPNF II/6:267).

<sup>1082</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.3 (ANF 2:349).

<sup>1083</sup> Cf. St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 2.6 (ANF 2:353–354).

<sup>1084</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, Books 1–5* 4.1.14 (FOTC 103:243).

<sup>1085</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Against Celsus* 4.3 (ANF 4:498).

“Let not then the Christian say, I am free; I have been called unto liberty: I was a slave, but have been redeemed, and by my very redemption have been made free, I shall do what I please: no one may balk me of my will, if I am free. But if you commit sin with such a will, you are the servant of sin. Do not then abuse your liberty for freedom in sinning, but use it for the purpose of not sinning ... For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another’ (Gal. 5:13).”<sup>1086</sup> And elsewhere he says, “Therefore the good man, although he is a slave, is free; but the bad man, even if he reigns, is a slave.”<sup>1087</sup>

### **1331. Does baptism confer freedom upon us?**

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “Holy Baptism grants us perfect freedom although a person has perfect free will to either enslave himself once again to the bonds of passions or to remain free in fulfilling the commandments. If the mind clings to any of the passions, this is the product of our own free wills and not of coercion. Scripture says that we have been given the authority to ‘cast down arguments’ (2 Cor. 5:10) ... And so, for those who cast it down, a wicked thought would be a sign of their love for God and not a sin, because the presence of an evil thought is not sin in itself, but the sin lies in the conversation of the mind with it — an amicable and friendly conversation. We are not delighted by evil thoughts, so why do we leave them in our minds for so long? If our hearts hate the thought wholeheartedly, then we must not leave our hearts to converse with it, unless there is a malicious fellowship with it.”

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<sup>1086</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 41:8 (NPNF I/7:233) amended.

<sup>1087</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 4.3 (NPNF I/2:66).

## 13

### Wealth and the Wealthy in the Christian Faith

#### 1332. Do the believer have the right to own private property?

St. Luke the Evangelist describes the state of the Church in the era of the apostles thus: “Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common” (Acts 2:44). He also says, “Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common” (Acts 4:32). So, did the Church prohibit Christians from owning private property? This right is the cause of the division of society into classes such as the wealthy, the middle class, the poor, and the completely destitute.

In the Old Testament, we find that Abraham the father of all the faithful was very rich (Gen. 13:2); but nevertheless, he was known for his hospitality for strangers and for his generous giving, even to the extent that he offered his only son as a sacrifice of love to God. And in addition, he was humble and meek. In the New Testament, the Lord Christ criticizes the rich fool; not because he was rich, but because he put his trust in his money and not in God (Luke 12:20). He also criticizes the rich man who showed no care for poor Lazarus; not because the rich man was rich, but because of the cruelty of his heart and his neglect of the poor (Luke 16:19–31). The apostle James criticizes the rich for their injustice towards their hired laborers (James 5:4). He also criticizes the church community for favoring the rich over the poor (James 2:1–6). We cannot forget that the Lord accepted the offering of the rich Joseph of Arimathea who offered his own tomb for the burial of His body (Matt. 27:60). And in its liturgies, the Church prays for the rich as well as for the poor; for example, in the liturgy of St. Gregory: “Mercy to those in repentance, goodness to the rich ... Meekness to the honorable, help to the poor.”

#### 1333. Is private ownership evil?

The Church Fathers did not condemn private ownership; they did however condemn its misuse and corruption. In a document from the apostolic age, **Hermas**, we read: “Practice an expenditure of your own, in which you can rejoice; and do not corrupt nor touch what is another’s nor covet it.”<sup>1088</sup> **St. Clement of Alexandria** reminds us of the blessing of possessions and wealth when they are used to support those in need. Wealth should not be squandered for our own useless pleasures, but for the common benefit of all.<sup>1089</sup> **Lactantius**

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<sup>1088</sup> *Pastor of Hermas (or Shepherd of Hermas)*, Similitude 1.11 (ANF 2:32).

<sup>1089</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.1 (ANF 2:237–242).

states that perfect justice lies in using wealth not for personal pleasure, but for the common benefit.<sup>1090</sup> The views of the Fathers can be summarized in the following points:

- a. The Fathers do not think of ownership as independent possession, but rather as a kind of responsible management of goods over which we have been appointed to be faithful stewards.<sup>1091</sup>
- b. They distinguish between private ownership and coveting what belongs to others.
- c. In **St. Augustine's** view, the believer who is unable to give up his possessions must at least give up his love for them.<sup>1092</sup> The scholar **Origen** considers greed as a type of paganism. **St. Cyprian** sees greed as an enslavement to money and the forfeiture of the freedom of the children of God.<sup>1093</sup> And **St. John Chrysostom** believes that a miser worships money, and he must choose between worshipping the demon of mammon or worshipping the Lord Christ.<sup>1094</sup>
- d. **St. Gregory of Nyssa** believes that although we have the right to own private property, it is by no means an absolute right, for the believer must always take into consideration the power of God and the right of others to share his possessions. Private ownership has a spiritual role as well as a social role. The glaring disparity between social classes — in his opinion — is not the product of the individual's right to own private property, but of people's selfishness and lack of human conscience.
- e. **St. John Chrysostom** distinguishes between two types of property. There is public property, which God gave to all humanity alike, such as: the air; the sun; water; etc. These are basic and essential needs for life that no one can own privately. However, He allowed nonessential items to be possessed privately, such as: gold; silver; and precious stones; etc.; to provide the opportunity for the rich to show love for the poor, and for the poor to experience gratitude towards the rich.

### 1334. Does the Church disapprove of the right of an individual to private ownership?

In such matters the Church generally considers the positive aspects before the negative. For instance, the Church urges people to love others before warning them against hatred, resentment, and envy. As the community of the Church developed, the Church promoted a life of fellowship and generous almsgiving without disapproving of any individual's right to own property privately. The Church was more interested in the manner in which the faithful

<sup>1090</sup> Lactantius, *The Divine Institutes* 6.12 (ANF 7:175–178).

<sup>1091</sup> Cf. "Epistle to Diognetus," in Staniforth, Maxwell, and Andrew Louth, eds. *Early Christian Writings* (Penguin Classics, 1987) 10: p. 148.

<sup>1092</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Enarr. In Ps.* 131.5. Cf. his *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 35.9; 82.4 (NPNF I/8:81, 386).

<sup>1093</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 8: On Works and Alms* 13 (ANF 5:479).

<sup>1094</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 6.5–6 (NPNF I/13:76–77).

use their property — that is, that they use it for the edification of the whole community and for everyone’s contentment in the Lord.

**St. Ambrose** believes that all things were created for the use of all, that every person has the right to enjoy the goods of the earth, and that the idea of private ownership creates inequality.<sup>1095</sup>

According to **St. Augustine**, a pious person distinguishes between the *use* of an object and the *enjoyment* of it; one ought to use what he needs, and enjoy what may be enjoyed, without mixing the two up. He says:

“Those things which are objects of enjoyment make us happy. Those things which are objects of use assist, and (so to speak) support us in our efforts after happiness, so that we can attain the things that make us happy and rest in them.”<sup>1096</sup>

“... do you think it is right to blame silver and gold because of greedy men, or food and wine because of gluttons and drunkards, or the feminine form because of fornicators and adulterers, and so on, particularly, when you see the physician puts fire to a good use while the poisoner uses bread for his wicked purposes?”<sup>1097</sup>

“[Job], having lost all his riches and been reduced suddenly to destitution, he kept his soul so undisturbed and fixed upon God as to show that earthly things were not important in his sight, but that he was greater than they and God greater than he. If the men of our day could be of such mind, we would not have to be so strongly prohibited in the New Testament from possessing these goods in order that we might become perfect. For to possess such things without clinging to them is much more admirable than not to possess them at all.”<sup>1098</sup>

St. Augustine believes that we ought to use what we have and not let it use us, or as he says, “Possess temporal things, but do not let them possess you.” Concerning this matter he says, “In the Catholic Church, there are great numbers of the faithful who do not use worldly goods; there are others who use them as though not using them, as the Apostle said (cf. 1 Cor. 7:31), and as has been proved in times when Christians were forced to worship idols. For how many men of wealth, how many rural householders, and merchants, and soldiers, how many civic leaders, and even senators, persons of both sexes, suffered for the true faith and religion, giving up all those vain and temporal goods which they used but were not enslaved to, thus providing to unbelievers that they possessed these goods and were not possessed by them.”<sup>1099</sup>

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<sup>1095</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press. 2001) 7.124, 247: pp. 228–229, 268.

<sup>1096</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.3 (NPNF I/2:523).

<sup>1097</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Free Choice of the Will* 1.15.33 (FOTC 59:105).

<sup>1098</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church* 1.23.42 (FOTC 56:36).

<sup>1099</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Way of Life of the Catholic Church* 1.35.77 (FOTC 56:59).



“What comfort do they [i.e., possessions] bring, seeing that it is better to be independent of such things than to enjoy abundance of them, because, when possessed, they occasion, through our fear of losing them, more vexation than was caused by the strength of desire with which their possession was coveted? Men are not made good by possessing these so-called good things.”<sup>1100</sup>

“But this class does not include the rich Christians who, although they possess riches, are not possessed by them, because they have renounced the world in truth and from their heart, and who put no hope in such possessions. These use a sound discipline in training their wives, their children, and their whole household to cling to the Christian religion; their homes, overflowing with hospitality ... they deal their bread to the hungry, they clothe the naked (cf. Isa. 48:7; Matt. 25:35–36), they ransom the captive, ‘to lay up in store for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on the true life’ (1 Tim. 6:19).”<sup>1101</sup>

“If we wish to return to our Father’s home, this world must be used, not enjoyed, that so the invisible things of God may be clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made (Rom. 1:20) — that is, that by means of what is material and temporary we may lay hold upon that which is spiritual and eternal.”<sup>1102</sup>

### **1335. Why is it that some things are owned by all while others are owned privately?**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What is the sense of this: ‘Who gives to us all things richly to enjoy’ (1 Tim. 6:17)? God gives all those things with liberality, which are more necessary than riches; such, for example, as the air, the water, the fire, the sun; all things of this kind. The rich man is not able to say that he enjoys more of the sunbeams than the poor man; he is not able to say that he breathes more plenteous air: but all these are offered alike to all. And wherefore, one may say, is it the greater and more necessary blessings, and those which maintain our life, that God has made common; but the smaller and less valuable (I speak of money) are not thus common. Why is this? In order that our life might be disciplined, and that we might have [a] training ground for virtue. For if these necessities were not common, perhaps they who are rich, practising their usual covetousness, would strangle those who were poor. For if they do this for the sake of money, much rather would they do so for the things referred to. Again, if money was also an universal possession, and were offered in the same manner to all, the occasion for almsgiving, and the opportunity for benevolence, would be taken away.”<sup>1103</sup>

He also says, “Tell me, then, whence are you rich? From whom did you receive it, and from whom he who transmitted it to you? From his father and his grandfather. But can you, ascending through many generations, show the acquisition just? It cannot be. The root and

<sup>1100</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters* 130.3 (NPNF I/1:460).

<sup>1101</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Vol. III (131–164)* 157 (FOTC 20:348–349).

<sup>1102</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4 (NPNF I/2:523).

<sup>1103</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 2.19 (NPNF I/9:351) amended.

origin of it must have been injustice. Why? Because God in the beginning made not one man rich, and another poor. Nor did He afterwards take and show to one treasures of gold, and deny to the other the right of searching for it: but He left the earth free to all alike. Why then, if it is common, have you so many acres of land, while your neighbor has not a portion of it? It was transmitted to me by my father. And by whom to him? By his forefathers. But you must go back and find the original owner.”<sup>1104</sup>

### **1336. Is not the right to private property absolute?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Consider yourself, who you are, what resources have been entrusted to you, from whom you received them, and why you received more than others. You have been made a minister of God’s goodness, a steward of your fellow servants. Do not suppose that all this was furnished for your own gullet! Resolve to treat the things in your possession as belonging to others. After all, they bring pleasure for only a little while, then fade away and disappear, but afterwards a strict accounting of their disbursement will be demanded from you. But you! You keep everything locked up and securely fastened with gates and bars. You lie awake at night with worry.”<sup>1105</sup>

### **1337. Imitate the fruitful earth.**

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “This is a rule of the most perfect Christianity, this is a landmark exactly laid down, this is the point that stands highest of all; seeking those things which are for the common profit: which also Paul himself declared, by adding, ‘even as I also am of Christ’ (1 Cor. 11:1). For nothing can so make a man an imitator of Christ as caring for his neighbors. Though you should fast, though you should lie upon the ground, and even strangle yourself, but take no thought for your neighbour; you have wrought nothing great, but still stand far from this Image, while so doing.”<sup>1106</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Gatherings and communal life make it apparent why the tendency to share our possessions with others is necessary. ‘Give to him who asks you’ (Matt. 5:42). The Lord asks us to be ready to give whoever asks us for alms and to consider the needs of all who ask us.”<sup>1107</sup>

He also says, “Imitate the earth, O mortal. Bear fruit as it does; do not show yourself inferior to inanimate soil. After all, the earth does not nurture fruit for its own enjoyment, but for your benefit. But whatever fruit of good works you bring forth, you produce for yourself, since the grace of good works redounds to those who perform them. You gave to the poor,

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<sup>1104</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* 12 (NPNF I/13:447).

<sup>1105</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, “I Will Tear Down My Barns,” 2 in *On Social Justice* (PP 38:61–62).

<sup>1106</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 25.3 (NPNF I/12:146) amended.

<sup>1107</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Psalms* 1.6 on Ps. 14.

and in so doing not only did you make what you gave truly your own, but you received back even more. For just as grain, when it falls upon the ground, brings forth an increase for the one who scatters it, thus also bread cast to the hungry yields considerable profit at a later time. Therefore, let the end of your harvesting be the beginning of a heavenly sowing. As the Scripture says, ‘Sow for yourselves righteousness’ (Hos. 10:12).”<sup>1108</sup>

### 1338. What should a believer’s attitude to private ownership be?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “This wealth is not a possession, it is not property, it is a loan for use. For when you die, willingly or unwillingly, all that you have goes to others, and they again give it up to others, and they again to others. For we are all sojourners ... Property, in fact, is but a word: we are all owners in fact but of other men’s possessions ... Our goods here are not our own; we have only a life interest in them ... Only the virtues of the soul are properly our own ... For we cannot take our wealth with us, when we depart hence, but we can take our charities.”<sup>1109</sup> He also says, “Is not ‘the earth God’s, and the fullness thereof?’ If then our possessions belong to one common Lord, they belong also to our fellow-servants. The possessions of one Lord are all common.”<sup>1110</sup>

### 1339. Why are some of the Fathers uncomfortable with the terms, “mine and yours”?

**St. Pachomius**, the founder of Christian coenobitic monasticism, believes that these two words can ruin a monastery and the monastic life.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “And observe, that concerning things that are common there is no contention, but all is peaceable. But when one attempts to possess himself of anything, to make it his own, then contention is introduced, as if nature herself were indignant, that when God brings us together in every way, we are eager to divide and separate ourselves by appropriating things, and by using those cold words mine and yours. Then there is contention and uneasiness. But where this is not, no strife or contention is bred.”<sup>1111</sup>

### 1340. How can we be faithful in earthly matters?

**First: Use earthly goods to obtain eternal goods.** **St. Augustine** says, “every man who made a good use of these advantages suited to the peace of this mortal condition, should receive ampler and better blessings, namely, the peace of immortality, accompanied by glory and honor in an endless life made fit for the enjoyment of God and of one another in God;

<sup>1108</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, “I Will Tear Down My Barns,” 3 in *On Social Justice* (PP 38:62–63).

<sup>1109</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* Homily 11 (NPNF I/13:443).

<sup>1110</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* Homily 12 (NPNF I/13:448).

<sup>1111</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy* Homily 12 (NPNF I/13:448).

but that he who used the present blessings badly should both lose them and should not receive the others.”<sup>1112</sup>

**Second: Do not fear wealth; fear greed. St. John Chrysostom** says, “And let us produce the lessons of true wisdom, and say, we forbid not riches, but ill-gotten riches. For it is lawful to be rich, but without covetousness, without rapine and violence, and an ill report from all men.”<sup>1113</sup>

**Third: Strive for the sake of the common good. St. John Chrysostom** says, “for everyone is bound to make full use of what he has for the common advantage. If it be wisdom you have, if power, if wealth, if what it may, let it not be for the hurt of your fellow-servants, neither for your own ruin.”<sup>1114</sup> He also says, “Whence then proceeds the great inequality of conditions in life? From the avarice and pride of the wealthy.”<sup>1115</sup>

**Fourth: Do not misuse your possessions. St. Augustine** says, “In this life the wrong of evil possessors is endured and among them certain laws are established which are called civil laws, not because they bring men to make a good use of their wealth, but because those who make a bad use of it become thereby less injurious.”<sup>1116</sup> And **St. Ambrose** says:

“The earth was established in common for all, rich and poor. Why do you alone, O rich, demand special treatment? Nature, which begets everyone poor, knows no wealthy, for we are not born with clothing or begotten with gold and silver. Naked it brings us into the light (cf. Job 1:21), wanting food, clothing and drink, and naked the earth receives us whom it brought forth, not knowing how to compass our possessions in the tomb. The narrow sod is equally spacious for poor and rich, and the earth, which did not contain the desires of the rich person when he was alive, now contains him entirely.”<sup>1117</sup>

“... for nature has poured forth all things for all men for common use. God has ordered all things to be produced, so that there should be food in common to all, and that the earth should be a common possession for all. Nature, therefore, has produced a common right for all, but greed has made it a right for a few.”<sup>1118</sup>

“The world was created for all, but you few rich try to keep it for yourselves.”<sup>1119</sup>

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<sup>1112</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 19.13 (NPNF I/2:410).

<sup>1113</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 11.5 (NPNF I/12:62).

<sup>1114</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 77.3 (NPNF I/10:448) amended.

<sup>1115</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John* 15.3 (NPNF I/14:53).

<sup>1116</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Vol. III (131–164)* 153 (FOTC 20:302).

<sup>1117</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, “On Naboth” in *Ambrose*, trans., Boniface Ramsey (Routledge, 1997) 1.2: p. 118.

<sup>1118</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Duties of the Clergy* 1.28.132 (NPNF II/10:23).

<sup>1119</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, “On Naboth” in *Ambrose*, trans., Boniface Ramsey (Routledge, 1997) 3.11: p. 120.

### 1341. How did the faith remedy the world's economic problems?

As Christianity spread with great rapidity, a solution to these problems became available; not through the imposition of civil laws, but through an understanding based on faith that works in the mind and heart. Every believer — and indeed, the Church as a whole — must care for the poor, the widows, the orphans, and all those suffering from financial distress and hunger. Thus, the Christian concern with eternal salvation and sincere love for other people produced practical solutions, as the Book of Acts and the letters of St. Paul witness. The churches collected donations for the poor of Jerusalem who were enduring a famine. Indeed, communal sharing of each other's possessions is one of the chief characteristics of the life of the Church that practices its faith, and a sign of love for others and of unity.<sup>1120</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “[God] made all things for all. All things therefore are common, and not for the rich to appropriate an undue share ... For God has given to us, I know well, the liberty of use, but only so far as necessary; and He has determined that the use should be common. And it is monstrous for one to live in luxury, while many are in want.”<sup>1121</sup>

If the rich glory in their possessions now, one day all their possessions will be taken away from them and there will be no difference between them and their servants. Often, these rich masters are actually less healthy than their servants. Therefore, we should not marvel if God sometimes permitted His faithful servants to be in need. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Take away, then, directly the ornaments from women, and domestics from masters, and you will find masters in no respect different from bought slaves in step, or look, or voice, so like are they to their slaves. But they differ in that they are feebler than their slaves, and have a more sickly upbringing.”<sup>1122</sup>

### 1342. Can the wealthy be saved?

In his contemplation of the parable of the foolish rich man and poor Lazarus, **St. Augustine** points out that while Lazarus who was poor was carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham who was said to have been very rich (Gen. 13:2), the miserly rich man went down to Hades. It was not poverty that fitted Lazarus to rest in the bosom of Abraham, nor was it wealth that destroyed the rich man; rather, the godliness and acceptance of the former and the greed, hardness of heart, and stinginess of the latter. Otherwise, the bosom of the very rich Abraham (Luke 16:22) would not have been used as a symbol of the kingdom of God.

St. Augustine says, “Although the haughty rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen and feasted sumptuously every day, died and was tormented in hell, nevertheless, if he

<sup>1120</sup> Cf. St. Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Magnesians* 7 (ANF 1:62).

<sup>1121</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 2.13 (ANF 2:268).

<sup>1122</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.6 (ANF 2:279–280).

had shown mercy to the poor many covered with sores who lay at his door and was treated with scorn, he himself would have deserved mercy. And if the poor man's merit had been his poverty, not his goodness, he surely would not have been carried by angels into the bosom of Abraham who had been rich in this life. This is intended to show us that on the one hand it was not poverty in itself that was divinely honored, nor, on the other, riches that were condemned, but that the godliness of the one and the ungodliness of the other had their own consequences, and, as the torment of fire was the lot of the ungodly rich man, so the bosom of the rich Abraham received the godly poor man."<sup>1123</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says that we ought not to allow our domestic matters to become a burden for ourselves. Like a clever and wise traveler, we should keep things in their true perspective. A wife who loves her husband does not pack any more for the journey than what is needed. Asceticism and contentment are both treasures for a traveler on his journey towards heaven. Just as the foot determines the size of the shoe, it is also the body that governs what a person needs to acquire and possess.<sup>1124</sup>

St. Clement says, "If he is rich, he will be saved by distributing it. For as gushing wells, when pumped out, rise again to their former measure, so giving away, being the benignant spring of love, by communicating of its drink to the thirsty, again increases and is replenished, just as the milk is wont to flow into the breasts that are sucked or milked. For he who has the almighty God, the Word, is in want of nothing, and never is in straits for what he needs. For the Word is a possession that wants nothing."<sup>1125</sup> He also says that we should approach wealth with reason and wisdom; and when we give, it must be with love and not to show off.<sup>1126</sup>

"This best of maxims, then, ought to be perpetually repeated, 'That the good man, being temperate and just,' treasures up his wealth in heaven. He who has sold his worldly goods, and given them to the poor, finds the imperishable treasure."<sup>1127</sup> It seems to me that wealth is like a snake that wraps itself around a person and bites him, if the person does not handle it with caution or does not know how to snare the snake in a manner that protects him from its danger and constrains the movements of its tail.

### **1343. What is our motive for giving?**

We give to the needy neither out of justice nor the human sense of compassion, but because the believer sees the person of the Lord Christ in the poor. **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, "Do not belittle such people by rejecting them, and do not think that they are without

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<sup>1123</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Vol. III (131–164)* 157 (FOTC 20:340–341).

<sup>1124</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.7 (ANF 2:281).

<sup>1125</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.7 (ANF 2:281).

<sup>1126</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.6 (ANF 2:280).

<sup>1127</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Instructor (Paedagogus)* 3.6 (ANF 2:280).

value. Think about them. Consider again their lives, and you will see that they are people who deserve dignity, for most of them bear in themselves the person of the Savior.”

“If, then, you place any credence in what I say, servants of Christ and brothers and fellow heirs (Rom. 8:17; Eph. 3:6), while we may, let us visit Christ, let us heal Christ, let us feed Christ, let us clothe Christ, let us welcome Christ (Matt. 25:35), let us honor Christ, not with food alone, like some (Luke 7:36), nor with ointments, like Mary (John 12:3); nor with tomb alone, like Joseph of Arimathea; nor with obsequies, like Nicodemus (John 19:38–39), who loved Christ in half measure; nor with gold and frankincense and myrrh as the Magi (Matt. 2:11) did before these others. Rather, since the Lord of all will have *mercy, and not sacrifice* (Matt. 9:13) and since a kind heart is worth more than *myriads of fat sheep* (Deut. 3:39 LXX), this let us offer to him through the poor who are today downtrodden, so that when we depart this world they may receive us into the eternal habitations (Luke 16:9) in Christ himself, our Lord, to whom be the glory forever. Amen.”<sup>1128</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Because he is a poor man, feed him; because so Christ is fed.”<sup>1129</sup> **St. Cyprian of Carthage** says, “Wherefore now also the captivity of our brethren must be reckoned as our captivity ... Christ is to be contemplated in our captive brethren.”<sup>1130</sup> And **St. Augustine** says, “Christ is hungered, here He is thirsty, is naked, is a stranger, is sick, is in prison. For whatsoever His Body suffers here, He has said that Himself suffers.”<sup>1131</sup>

#### 1344. What is our motive for showing hospitality to strangers?

Hospitality to strangers is an essential virtue in the life of a Christian, and so the scholar **Tertullian** includes this among his reasons why a Christian woman should not marry a pagan man, for that would prevent her from showing hospitality to travelers in her home. The scholar **Origen** says that Christians ought to show hospitality to strangers in the same spirit with which Abraham received the three traveling strangers at Mamre, washed their feet, and anointed them with oil.<sup>1132</sup> And **St. Justin** says, “We who hated and destroyed one another, and on account of their different manners would not live with men of a different tribe, now, since the coming of Christ, live familiarly with them.”<sup>1133</sup>

#### 1345. What do the Fathers say about those refuse to give?

**First: They accuse them of stealing.** **St. Augustine** says, “But to our prayers we must add, by almsgiving and fasting, the wings of loving kindness, so that they may fly the more easily to God and reach him. From this the Christian mind can readily understand how far

<sup>1128</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations* 14.39 (FOTC 107:70–71).

<sup>1129</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 48.9 (NPNF I/10:293).

<sup>1130</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Epistles* 59.1–2 (ANF 5:355).

<sup>1131</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, 87.2 (NPNF I/6:517)

<sup>1132</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis* 4.1–2 (FOTC 71:104–106).

<sup>1133</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 14 (ANF 1:167).

removed we should be from the fraudulent filching of other people’s property; when it perceives how similar it is to fraud when you don’t give to the needy what you don’t need yourself.”<sup>1134</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “not only robbery of other men’s goods, but also the not imparting of our own good things to others,—that this also is robbery ... God, rebuking the Jews, speaks thus ... you have robbed the poor. This is said in order to show to the rich that they possess things which belong to the poor, even if their property be gained by inheritance,—in fact, from whatever source their substance might be derived. And, again, in another place, it is said, ‘Do not deprive the poor of life’ (Sir. 4:1).”<sup>1135</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “You must also avoid the sin of covetousness, and this not merely by refusing to seize upon what belongs to others, for that is punished by the laws of the state, but also by not keeping your own property, which has now become no longer yours. ‘If you have not been faithful,’ the Lord says, ‘in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own?’ (Luke 16:12) ‘That which is another man’s’ is a quantity of gold or of silver, while ‘that which is our own’ is the spiritual heritage.”<sup>1136</sup>

**St. Basil the Great** says, “If one possessed the goods of the poor; you caught him and made him a part of your abundance. You have shown yourself more unjust than the unjust, and more miserly than the miser.”<sup>1137</sup>

**Second: They deem them unjust.** **St. Basil the Great** says, “Who are the greedy? Those who are not satisfied with what suffices for their own needs. Who are the robbers? Those who take for themselves what rightfully belongs to everyone. And you, are you not greedy? Are you not a robber? The things you received in trust as a stewardship, have you not appropriated them for yourself? Is not the person who strips another of clothing called a thief? And those who do not clothe the naked when they have the power to do so, should they not be called the same? The bread you are holding back is for the hungry, the clothes you keep put away are for the naked, the shoes that are rotting away with disuse are for those who have none, the silver you keep buried in the earth is for the needy. You are thus guilty of injustice toward as many as you might have aided, and did not.”<sup>1138</sup>

“Nothing, if it were bad in itself, would have been created by God. ‘For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected’ (1 Tim. 4:4). So also the commandment of the Lord does not teach us to avoid or cast away possessions as evil things in themselves, but to

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<sup>1134</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VI: Sermons 184–229Z*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1993) 206.2: p. 107.

<sup>1135</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Four discourses of Chrysostom, chiefly on the parable of the rich man and Lazarus*, trans., F. Allen (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1869) 2.4: p. 50–51 amended.

<sup>1136</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 22.31 (NPNF II/6:36).

<sup>1137</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 7.3 (NPNF II/8:91).

<sup>1138</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, “I Will Tear Down My Barns” 7 in *On Social Justice* (PP 38:69–70).



manage them rightly. One who is judged, is not blamed for possessing things, but for misusing them. For earthly possessions are not rejected if managed by a wise will.”<sup>1139</sup>

**1346. What do the Fathers say about those who love to give?**

**St. Basil the Great** says, “Like a mighty river that is divided into many streams in order to irrigate the fertile soil, so also are those who give their wealth to be divided up and distributed in the houses of the poverty-stricken. Wells become more productive if they are drained completely, while they silt up if they are left standing. Thus wealth left idle is of no use to anyone, but put to use and exchanged it becomes fruitful and beneficial for the public.”<sup>1140</sup>

**1347. Do we need those in need?**

**St. Augustine** says, “Let us not, then, spurn our God when he is needy in the poor, so that we in our need may be satisfied by him in his riches. We have needy people, and we are needy ourselves; so let us give, in order to receive. But now, what is it that we do give? And in exchange for this paltry, visible, temporal and earthly whatever it is, what is it that we desire to receive? *What eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor has it come up into the heart of man* (1 Cor. 2:9).”<sup>1141</sup>

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<sup>1139</sup> *The Short Rules, Answer on question 92.*

<sup>1140</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, “I Will Tear Down My Barns” 5 in *On Social Justice* (PP 38:66).

<sup>1141</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VI: Sermons 184–229Z*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1993) 206.2: p. 107.

## 14

### Science and Faith

#### **1348. What is the purpose of the Holy Bible? And what is the purpose of modern science?**

The goal of the Holy Bible is not the investigation of the process of creation and how it was accomplished, but the knowledge of God the lover of humanity who never abandoned us after He created us, and knowledge of His divine plan to restore to us what we lost when we were separated from Him. The purpose of the Holy Bible is to reveal divine mysteries to humanity insofar as our present abilities allow us to comprehend, and to reveal what lies before us in the world to come. This inspires in us a desire and yearning to enjoy grace and the life of praise and to taste the promise of heaven. But the world seeks after the mysteries of the creation and that which will facilitate constant progress until the final coming of the Lord.

#### **1349. Why didn't God reveal all scientific facts from the beginning of creation to our ancestors Adam and Eve?**

- a. God sanctifies free will and human effort. Thus, He opened the doors of study and growth in knowledge to them.
- b. That we might perceive the value of the gift of the mind and its sanctity, without disregarding God's help.
- c. God offers every generation the knowledge that it needs, so that it may give thanks to God for the gift of the growth of constructive knowledge.
- d. People remain thirsty for the gift of knowledge in all aspects of life, both here and in eternity. Nonetheless, knowledge of matters that are not essential to us can sometimes cause harm to our lives as humans.

#### **1350. What do the Church Fathers say about the six days of creation?**

In his homilies on the *Hexaemeron* (i.e., the six days of creation), **St. Basil** explains that the role of the Church is not to investigate the nature of things and creatures, but rather to study its function and benefit. **St. Augustine** declares, "It is much to you to understand how He created them since He created yourself so, that you may first be a servant obeying, and afterward perhaps a friend understanding."<sup>1142</sup>

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<sup>1142</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* 102.29 (NPNF I/8:502).

**1351. How do some western scholars view the contents of the Book of Genesis?**

Many western scholars have attempted to show that the contents of the Book of Genesis in no way conflict with the mindset and findings of modern science. Some hold that the sequence of creation found in Genesis matches the understanding of the evolution of the creation with great accuracy. A great many studies on this topic have been published, some of them written by devout scientists. Arabic readers may be interested in a book published by St. George Church in Sporting that is a simplified study by Dr. Youssef Riad, a professor in the Faculty of Science at the University of Alexandria, titled *The Compatibility of Modern Science with the Holy Scriptures*. Also, the Coptic Bishopic of Youth has published a book by Dr. Fawzi Elias called *The Six Days of Creation*.

**1352. What does the word “day” [yom] mean in the first chapter of Genesis?**

It does not mean a literal twenty-four-hour time period, but an age of time that may extend for millions of years. The sun, the moon, and the planets were not created until the fourth age. Therefore, before their creation, there could have been no measurement of time as we experience it today, nor could the earth have experienced day and night in any physical sense. This was affirmed by many Church Fathers, such as St. Jerome.<sup>1143</sup>

**1353. What does the word “day” [yom] mean in other parts of the Holy Bible?**

Beyond the creation account, the Holy Bible often uses the term “day” in a broader sense than the time span of twenty-four hours. For example, the Psalmist says, “For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand” (Ps. 84:10; cf. Ps. 90:4; 2 Pet. 3:8). In fact, the word “day” in the Holy Bible can have many meanings. Another of its possible meanings is “eternity,” as when the Father tells the Son, “You are My Son, *today* I have begotten You” (Ps. 2:7; Acts 13:32; Heb. 1:5). God was also called “the Ancient of Days” (Dan. 7:9) meaning, “the eternal.” And “day” signifies an eternity that transcends time in the phrase: “the day of the Lord” (Acts 2:20), which refers to His second coming. Thus, it is said of the Lord Christ, “our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and forever” (2 Pet. 3:18 NKJV).<sup>1144</sup>

**1354. Did God rest from His work for humanity after the days of creation?**

God, who worked to present us with this world for our benefit, is the Creator who will continue working unceasingly. What He began, He will not cease. God Himself continues to work in the lives of humanity to make of us a new heaven and a new earth, wherein

<sup>1143</sup> St. Jerome, Hom. 1.

<sup>1144</sup> Translators’ Note: The original Greek of the end of this verse reads *αὐτῶ η̅ δοξα και νυν και εις η̅μεραν α̅ιωνος*, which is literally translated “now and to the **day** of the age.” The Arabic SVD translation reflects this: “الآنَ وَإِلَى يَوْمِ الدَّهْرِ”.

righteousness dwell. Concerning this, the Lord Christ says, “My Father has been working until now, and I have been working” (John 5:17). That is why in our interpretation here, we want to sense the continuous work of God in our inner lives, that He may continue to create within us without ceasing, renewing our depths.

**1355. What do the introductory words of the Book of Genesis mean: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth”?**

The expression “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1) cannot signify a certain point in time, for time had not yet come into being. Rather, this phrase is meant to indicate that the physical world has a beginning and is not — as some philosophers claimed — beginningless, sharing in God’s eternity.

This is what **St. Basil** affirms in his book *The Hexaemeron (The Six Days of Creation)*, for he says that the expression “in the beginning” does not refer to a point in time, or else the “beginning” would itself have begun, and must have its own beginning and end; and this beginning of the “beginning” would have *its* own beginning; and thus we would be lost in an infinite regression of beginnings. Rather, “the beginning” here means the First Cause, and not a quantity of time, as in the verse: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 9:10).<sup>1145</sup>

He says, “Do not then imagine, O man! That the visible world is without a beginning; and because the celestial bodies move in a circular course, and it is difficult for our senses to define the point where the circle begins, do not believe that bodies impelled by a circular movement are, from their nature, without a beginning.”<sup>1146</sup> He again says, “That which was begun in time is condemned to come to an end in time.”<sup>1147</sup> Here he is not talking about a point in time at the start of the chain of causation; rather, he is refuting the idea that the world is beginningless. Even in the absence of time, there was a Beginning outside of time, when the world was still non-existent. Science has come to confirm the non-eternity of matter.<sup>1148</sup>

Besides this literal or historical interpretation of “in the beginning,” many Fathers espouse an allegorical or spiritual interpretation. In their view, “in Christ Jesus” or “in the Word of God” the heavens and the earth were created. Here are some of their words about this topic:

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<sup>1145</sup> See St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 1.6 (NPNF II/8:55).

<sup>1146</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 1.3 (NPNF II/8:53).

<sup>1147</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 1.3 (NPNF II/8:53).

<sup>1148</sup> See Fawzy Elias, *The Six Days of Creation (sitat 'ayaam alkhaliqa, Arabic)* (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1995): pp. 11–14.

**St. Augustine** says, “The Son Himself is the Beginning. When the Jews asked Him: Who are you? He answered them, ‘I am from the beginning’ (John 8:25). Likewise in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”<sup>1149</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, “What is the beginning of all things except our Lord and ‘Savior of all,’ Jesus Christ ‘the firstborn of every creature’ (1 Tim. 4:10; Col. 1:15)? In this beginning, therefore, that is, in His Word, ‘God made heaven and earth’ as the evangelist John also says in the beginning of his Gospel: ‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him, and without him nothing was made’ (John 1:1–3). Scripture is not speaking here of any temporal beginning, but it says that the heaven and the earth and all things which were made were made ‘in the beginning,’ that is, in the Savior.”<sup>1150</sup>

**St. Didymus the Blind** says, “If you were to think that the beginning is a particular time, on examination you would find it presupposes time; the word *beginning* has not one meaning, but many. In fact, sometimes it means the cause, as in this case: heaven and earth exist in the cause ... everything was made by the Word, remember, and in Christ Jesus ‘there were created things on earth and things in heaven, things visible and invisible.’”<sup>1151</sup>

In short, we can say that God created the world, and that this creation is its beginning, and the world is not co-eternal with God. Further, the Word of God is He who is necessarily without beginning, the Creator of all.

### **1356. Does everything mentioned in the Holy Bible agree with the findings of modern science?**

Let us consider how religion views science:

- a. If we start with the five books of Moses, we note that until the time of Moses, the discussion of creation revolved around myths and fantasies in which gods were depicted as marrying each other, fighting against one another, etc. On the other hand, the book of Genesis presents an extremely simplified account that even a young child can understand, without contradicting the findings of science; especially when we understand that the days of creation should not be taken to be twenty-four-hour periods but an unspecified period of time, as **St. Basil the Great** says.
- b. The Holy Bible does not have a problem with scientific research, but it does have a problem with haughtiness and with those who would discount that which transcends time and is its cause.

<sup>1149</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, PL 46:821.

<sup>1150</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis* 1.1 (FOTC 71:47).

<sup>1151</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Genesis* 1 (FOTC 132:25–26).

- c. The Holy Bible calls us to sanctify the body and its senses, and the mind and its faculties.
- d. Back in the first century, St. Mark the Evangelist came to Alexandria and encountered the pagan School of Alexandria that had been established by Ptolemy, among other Jewish and Egyptian schools. Rather than adopting a hostile attitude towards them, he instead established the Christian Catechetical School of Alexandria, as **St. Jerome** records. Its curriculum included the study of philosophies contemporary to that time, as well as medicine, astronomy, mathematics, and languages such as Greek and Egyptian (which evolved into Coptic). Through love and dialogue, the School of Alexandria won many scholars from the schools of philosophy to the faith. For this reason, some of these scholars continued to wear the pallium (cape) of the philosopher even as they studied at the Christian School.
- e. **St. Basil the Great**, who introduced monasticism to Neocaesarea, established schools that were attached to the monasteries to educate the young.
- f. The Holy Bible in no way undervalues the gifts of reason, science, or research. Rather, it discloses the purpose of the word of God as being to transport humanity to that which lies beyond our present world, to come to know our Creator, and to partake of the blessed life of those in heaven.
- g. Many theories that were once considered to be firm facts were later disproven and replaced by other theories.
- h. Most of the universities of Europe were originally founded by monks who were interested in science, although these institutions separate science from faith today.
- i. Surveys have shown that many well-known scientists from various fields who denied their faith in God returned to faith later in in their lives with even more zeal and enthusiasm.
- j. We ought to view the human being as a single entity: body, spirit, soul, mind, and emotions. Doctors research physical health, psychologists research mental health, and scientists research to advance scientific knowledge, etc. Yet we cannot ignore the reality of death that every human being faces. The purpose of faith is to provide us with what we need to know regarding our lives after death. Faith and divine grace can grant us inner joy with which we can face every hardship and tribulation so that we may experience the promise of heaven.
- k. Unfortunately, despite the there being no doubt that no person can escape death, some are preoccupied with their present lives and ignore the existence of eternal life.
- l. There are hundreds of prophecies about the Lord Christ the Savior, from the beginning of creation until His incarnation, that are consistent with each other, and which even non-believing historians accept. These prophecies were not produced by

the Christian Church — they are part of the Old Testament and were preserved by the Jews. They were only translated into other languages shortly before the coming of Christ, such as the Greek Septuagint which was completed at the request of Ptolemy around the second century B. C. The Apostles used this translation in their preaching, especially the apostle Paul who preached to the gentiles.

- m. We can appreciate the wisdom of the Christian Church in that from the first century on, it has allowed every nation to worship in its own language and culture; and yet, the Church enjoyed a wondrous unity until the fifth century. No nation insisted that its language alone was holy in Christian worship. With a spirit of love, many Christian writings were translated into the languages of other nations, while preserving their nuance and their spiritual and theological purpose. Some Coptic and Arabic texts about the Copts were lost amidst the destruction and burning of churches and monasteries, but translations of some of these texts into Amharic, Greek, and other languages have survived.

The believer does not deny the importance of the advancement of science, but he understands that these are theories that are liable to revision. For example: for a long time, scholars were confident that the Gospel of John was not written by St. John the Disciple, for its style was more like that of the second century. But when the Nag Hammadi papyri were discovered in 1948, manuscripts from the first century were among them that exhibit the same style as this gospel. Also, some scholars doubted the historical accuracy of some of the events recorded in the Holy Bible, such as those of the Book of Daniel. But more recent archaeological discoveries have confirmed the record of the Holy Bible as historical facts.

## Book 7

# **Eschatology *and the* After Life**

1. The Gift of Death and the Resurrected Life in Christ
2. The Sacred Pain of Loss
3. Millennialism (Chiliasm)
4. The Two Comings and the Rapture
5. The Final Judgment
6. The Resurrected Body
7. Heaven and the Jerusalem Above





# 1

## The Gift of Death and the Resurrected Life in Christ<sup>1152</sup>

### 1357. What is the Christian understanding of death?

The person who focuses his eyes on his own inner depths sees his Christ within, and therefore looks forward to the death of the body as a divine gift, seeing it as the bridge to immortality and a true liberation from temporal life with all of its physical and spiritual troubles and illnesses. As **St. Basil** says, “The death of the righteous has become rest, or rather, it has become life itself.”

**St. Anthony** says, “Death, when understood by men, is deathlessness; but, when not understood by the foolish, it is death. It is not this death that must be feared, but the loss of the soul, which is ignorance of God. This is indeed disaster for the soul.”<sup>1153</sup> He also says, “To escape death is impossible. Knowing this, those who are truly intelligent and practiced in virtue and in spiritual thought accept death uncomplainingly, without fear or grief, recognizing that it is inevitable and delivers them from the evils of this life.”<sup>1154</sup>

### 1358. What is the believer’s view of death?

At the death of **Caesarius**, the first-born son and successful doctor who held the high esteem of the men of the state in the imperial palace of Constantinople, his younger brother **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** observed their mother’s reaction to such a painful event. He noticed that she entered her bedroom, remained there a while, and then emerged dressed in the garments of a feast, her face beaming with a smile. The joy of her son’s departure to heaven had swallowed up all the painful emotions of her loss. The saint did not marvel at his mother’s behavior, but rather realized how truly she was a witness to the heavenly life.

This heavenly way of thinking was reflected in the life of her daughter **St. Gorgonia**. Her younger brother, St. Gregory, looked up to her as a living example of a Christian who burns with longing for heaven. In his account of her life, he says: “Gorgonia’s native land was ‘the Jerusalem above’ (Heb. 12:22) ... where Christ is citizen, and his fellow citizens the festal gathering and ‘assembly of the first born, whose names are written in heaven’ (Heb. 12:23) ... She snatched everything from the grasp of the ‘ruler of this world’ (Eph. 6:12), transferred

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<sup>1152</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Gift of Death* (*‘Atteyat al-Mawt, Arabic*) (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1998).

<sup>1153</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life” (attributed to St. Anthony) in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 49: p. 336.

<sup>1154</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life” (attributed to St. Anthony) in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 82: p. 342.

it all to a safe storehouse. She left nothing behind on this earth except her body. For everything else, she exchanged the hope of heaven. One form of riches she left to her [spiritual] children: an example to imitate, and the desire to rival her in these things ... She longed for her departure: indeed, she spoke her mind freely to the one who would call her to himself, and prized ‘being with Christ’ (Phil. 1:23) before all earthly blessings.”<sup>1155</sup>

That is how the true believer perceives death: a delightful journey to heaven through union with Christ who is risen from death. What, then, are funeral rites but a joyous celebration of a unique feast?

When I began collecting excerpts from patristic writings about “death and what is beyond death” or “eschatology,” I felt a sense of inferiority, for this way of thinking permeated all their writings. The Fathers see the doors of heaven open before them, awaiting their arrival with longing. Theirs is the mindset of those into whose hearts heaven has descended, because the Lord of heaven has descended to their world and lived among its inhabitants as one of them. Whether writing commentaries on texts of the Holy Bible, or defending a doctrine of faith, or recording liturgical texts for worship, or delivering spiritual sermons, or sending letters for one reason or another — they never cease their contemplation and discussion of heaven.

### **1359. What kinds of death are there?**

The Holy Bible mentions three kinds of death:

- a. The natural death of the body, where person loses his present life because of the separation of the soul from the body. The fruit of the disobedience of Adam and Eve is that all humanity has fallen under this death of the body.
- g. Spiritual death, which is the separation of a person from his Creator and Savior who is the source of his sanctification, renewal, and his preparation for glory.
- h. Eternal death, which is when a person isolates himself eternally from God and clings to this isolation; and therefore tastes the bitter fruit of his own disobedience which is deprivation of eternal life. This is the second death that is mentioned in the Book of Revelation: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death” (Rev. 20:14).

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<sup>1155</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, Oration 8.6, 12, 19, in Brian E. Daley, *Gregory of Nazianzus* (Routledge, 2006): pp. 66, 69, 73.

**1360. How did Christianity respond to the attitudes of pagan philosophy towards death?<sup>1156</sup>**

It was inevitable that Christianity should confront many pagan attitudes, and especially their attitudes towards death. Pagans thought of death as annihilation, a fate that befalls a person and destroys him, putting an end to his life forever. At the time when the Lord Christ came into the world, most of the gentiles saw death as a dreadful thing and did not believe that there was a life after death. Here are some inscriptions discovered on ancient tombs:

*“Fortune makes many promises, but keeps none of them.  
Live for the present day and your hour, for nothing else is really ours.”*

*“Live joyfully while you live. Life is but a little thing.  
Presently it begins, gradually grows stronger, and then gradually disappears.”<sup>1157</sup>*

There were pagan philosophers who did believe in a life after death, but it was a life without joy, a kind of eternal sleep associated with the darkness of the earth. No one can escape from the hands of gods filled with anger.<sup>1158</sup> For them, death was the destruction of all life. Those who desired death desired only to be rid of the troubles of this life; they did not expect a new life, but merely an existence without vitality or joy.

Greek philosophies opposed the notion of a body rising from the dead for one reason or another. The followers of **Plato** and **Plotinus** utterly rejected the concept of a bodily resurrection and considered the matter to be unworthy of discussion. Instead, they envisaged humanity to be spirits without bodies, thus depriving the person of his personal identity and individuality, and leading to an attitude that denigrates the flesh as a despicable thing of which the immortal spirit wishes to be free. Strangely enough, some of them say the spirit is purified by being rid of the flesh and by forgetting the tragedies it endured during its union with the body; and yet, they also thought that the soul does return again to the tragedy of life in a body. However, the Greek philosopher **Porphyry** — a leading Neoplatonist of the third and early fourth centuries — was one philosopher who rejected this idea of reincarnation of the spirit, the return of the soul to another body, because it would mean a return to the tragedies of the body and its life.

The Church’s rejection of this gloomy attitude is evident in inscriptions found on Christian tombs, which touch upon the promise of the heavenly life while still on earth. These

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<sup>1156</sup> See Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (Paulist Press, 1985): Ch. 12. See also Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Fathers of the School of Alexandria (Aba' al-Madrassa al-Iskendireya, Arabic)*, 1980; Costi Bendaly, *The God of Contemporary Atheism (Ilah al-Elhad al-Mu'asser, Arabic)*, Al-Nour Publications; and Bishop Youannis of Gharbia, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii - St. Paul Brotherhood, 2021) Kindle Edition.

<sup>1157</sup> Both inscriptions quoted in Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (Paulist Press, 1985): p. 213.

<sup>1158</sup> See Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (Paulist Press, 1985): p. 214.

inscriptions often express the peace and fellowship that will be enjoyed by the deceased in the eternal, glorious kingdom. There is no trace of the bitter curses usually found on pagan tombs. Rather, most Christian inscriptions are along the lines of: “*May you live in God! Rejoice forever!*” It is quite rare to find in these inscriptions any sense of the bitterness of sorrow or the pain of loss.<sup>1159</sup>

### **1361. What was the pagan view of the doctrine of resurrection?**

The Christian belief in the new life after death and that the body will have a share of eternal glory with the soul enabled them to face pain and death with great joy and drew the interest of pagans. **St. Justin Martyr** attests to this when he reveals his own feelings before he accepted the faith.<sup>1160</sup>

On the other hand, some pagan philosophers felt that the doctrine of a resurrection of the body and rebirth into a new life was among the most difficult obstacles preventing them from accepting Christianity. We can see this in the reactions to the apostle Paul’s declaration of the doctrine of resurrection at the Areopagus of Athens. Some mocked, while others said, “We will hear you again on this matter” (Acts 17:32). Thus, philosophical and theological conversations are frequent in Christian writings, especially in defenses of the Christian faith such as that by the philosopher **Athenagoras of Athens** in the second century.<sup>1161</sup>

### **1362. What did Athenagoras the philosopher and dean of the School of Alexandria say about the resurrection of the dead?**

Athenagoras is considered among the first Christian scholars to attempt to prove the doctrine of resurrection to pagan philosophers, not only through biblical evidence, but also through philosophical arguments. His work is considered to be among the best examples of early Christian writings on this topic.<sup>1162</sup> Despite containing certain flaws, it reveals a depth of understanding.<sup>1163</sup>

This work is composed of twenty-five chapters, divided into two parts. The first part contains negative arguments refuting the objections of the philosophers to the resurrection of bodies (chapters 1–10), while the second part presents his positive arguments and evidence

<sup>1159</sup> Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (Paulist Press, 1985): pp. 213–216.

<sup>1160</sup> See St. Justin Martyr, *Second Apology* 12 (ANF 1:192).

<sup>1161</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The School of Alexandria Before Origen* (Sydney: Pope Shenouda III Coptic Theological College, 1995): pp. 217–235; and Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, trans., Hilda C. Graef, 2nd ed. (Herder and Herder, 1961): p. 130f.

<sup>1162</sup> Athenagoras of Athens, *On the Resurrection of the Dead* (ANF 2). See also Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The School of Alexandria Before Origen* (Sydney: Pope Shenouda III Coptic Theological College, 1995): pp. 224–235; Berthold Altaner, *Patrology*, trans., Hilda C. Graef, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Herder and Herder, 1961): pp. 130–131.

<sup>1163</sup> Bernard Schmid, *Manual of Patrology* (St. Louis, Mo.: B. Herder, 1899): pp. 96–97.

for the truth of the resurrection (chapters 11–25). One could say that the first part deals with the topic of God and resurrection, while the second part deals with humanity and resurrection.

In the first part, he lays out the objections of the philosophers to resurrection based on the belief that God lacks the knowledge, the power, or the will to resurrect. He responds concerning knowledge by pointing out that if God created bodies in the first place, He must also know how to bring them back to life. Concerning power, he argues that if God can create out of nothing, He can also recreate even that which has decomposed and scattered, and whose elements have returned to the earth, or been taken up by human or beast. And concerning the will to resurrect, is it plausible that God would fear to raise a person lest injustice befall him, or because it might disgrace God in some way? The truth is that anyone raised from the dead would never suffer injustice, nor could such a resurrection bring disgrace upon God in any way, since it is God Himself who wills it.

In the second part, he offers arguments for resurrection based on the nature of humanity:

- a. It is necessary that human beings should be raised, for God created us as rational beings destined to live forever (chapters 11–13).
- b. The human being is composed of body and soul; a unity destroyed by death but eternally restored by resurrection (chapters 14–17).
- c. It is only fitting that the body should share with the soul in the reward of the world to come just as it shared in striving in this world (chapters 18–23).
- d. Humanity was created for an eternal joy that is never attained in this world — only in the next (chapters 24–25).

**Octavius**, too, defended Christianity, saying that it is easier for God to raise dead bodies to life than it was for Him to create them out of nothing in the first place. He also says that nature itself confirms resurrection: “See, therefore, how for our consolation all nature suggests a future resurrection. The sun sinks down and arises, the stars pass away and return, the flowers die and revive again, after their wintry decay the shrubs resume their leaves, seeds do not flourish again unless they are rotted: thus the body in the sepulchre is like the trees which in winter hide their verdure with a deceptive dryness. Why are you in haste for it to revive and return, while the winter is still raw? We must wait also for the spring-time of the body.”<sup>1164</sup>

### **1363. Why did pagans desecrate the bodies of the martyrs?**

Pagan persecutors of the Christians became aware of the Christian belief in the resurrection from the dead, and that the Christians drew a strength and hope from this belief that enabled them to joyfully withstand tortures. Therefore, they expended much effort in

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<sup>1164</sup> Minucius Felix, *The Octavius* 34 (ANF 4:194).

destroying the remains of the martyrs, thinking that in so doing, they would dash the Christians' hopes for a bodily resurrection.<sup>1165</sup> And yet, this did nothing to shake the Christian hope in the resurrection of the body, as is evident from the words of **Tatian the Syrian**: "Even though fire destroy all traces of my flesh, the world receives the vaporized matter; and though dispersed through rivers and seas, or torn in pieces by wild beasts, I am laid up in the storehouses of a wealthy Lord. And, although the poor and the godless know not what is stored up, yet God the Sovereign, when He pleases, will restore the substance that is visible to Him alone to its pristine condition."<sup>1166</sup>

### 1364. Why do the faithful have no fear of death?

A true Christian, as a living member united to the Head, Jesus Christ, accepts the marks of the crucified Christ who accepted death by His own will. Thus, he cherishes pain, seeks it, and desires it even unto death, insofar as it is a sign of the communion of genuine love and union between the suffering, crucified Bridegroom and His bride. Thus, for the believer, the cross transforms pain and death from being marks of sin and evidence of deprivation from God who is the source of happiness, into marks of love and communion. The apostle Paul says, "Always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10), and he affirms that this is the suffering of Christ: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ" (2 Cor. 1:5).

Many pagans were converted to faith in the Lord Christ when they witnessed how Christians faced death with courage and joy. Even in periods of peace, among the things that attracted pagans to the faith were the funeral rites of the Christians, with their sense of peace and hope in eternity.<sup>1167</sup> According to **St. Athanasius the Apostolic**:

"Stretching out His Hands upon the Cross, He overthrew the prince of power of the air, that now works in the sons of disobedience, and made the way clear from us into the heavens."<sup>1168</sup>

"For as he offered it to death on behalf of all, so through it he opened up again the way to heaven ... But since the Savior's raising the body, no longer is death fearsome, but all believers in Christ tread on it as nothing, and would rather choose to die than deny their faith in Christ. For they really know that when they die they are not destroyed, but both live and become incorruptible through the resurrection ... And the proof of this is that human beings, before believing in Christ, view death as fearsome and are terrified at it. But when they come

<sup>1165</sup> Lebreton: *History of the Primitive Church*, p. 483.

<sup>1166</sup> Tatian, *Address to the Greeks* 6 (ANF 2:67).

<sup>1167</sup> Boniface Ramsey, *Beginning to Read the Fathers* (Paulist Press, 1985): pp. 216–220.

<sup>1168</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Letters* 60.7 (NPNF II/4:577).

to faith in him and to his teaching, they so despise death that they eagerly rush to it and become witnesses to the resurrection over it effected by the Savior.”<sup>1169</sup>

### **1365. What should occupy our thoughts when we come to leave this world?**

In the midst of her pain, the martyr **St. Julia of Corsica** did not think of herself, but of the salvation of her persecutors, praying: “May You be blessed, my God and Master Jesus Christ, who made me worthy to die just like You and for Your sake, crucified upon the wood of a cross ... I ask You, O my God, by the right of Your pure and precious blood, to look upon this people sitting in the darkness of death with the eyes of Your mercy; to forgive them and to shine upon them with the light of faith in You.”

### **1366. How can we not be afraid of death?**

According to **St. Ambrose**, “So, if we want to rid ourselves of fear of death, let us stand where Christ is, so that of us, too, He can say those words: ‘*Truly, there are people standing here who shall not taste death*’ (Luke 9:27). It is not enough just to be present; you will have to be present where Christ is. Only those who stand firmly by Christ will escape the taste of death. The very choice of the verb leads us to conclude that those who visibly stand in the society of Jesus won’t have the slightest sensation of death. Of course, to die in the body means to have some slight flavour of death, but the life of the soul is safeguarded.”<sup>1170</sup>

He also says, “We ought not to close up our ears, but open them to hear the voice of Jesus. He who hears this voice has no fear of death.”

**St. Anthony** says, “It is not this death that must be feared, but the loss of the soul, which is ignorance of God. This is indeed disaster for the soul.”<sup>1171</sup>

**St. John Saba** says, “this is truly my expectation and my earnest desire regarding my Lord: that in that hour no one but He be there to help me and to close my eyes; and that when I lay prostrate on my face, I may attain to this with desire for Him. Many times this hour is nearer to me than that which gives joy or that which grieves.”<sup>1172</sup>

**St. Aphrahat** says, “They that live daintily fear death; but the afflicted look forward with hope that they shall be speedily taken away.”<sup>1173</sup>

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<sup>1169</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 25, 27 (PP 44A:105, 109).

<sup>1170</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of St. Ambrose on the Gospel according to Saint Luke*, trans., Ide M. Ni Riain (Dublin: Halcyon Press, 2001) 7.2: p. 192.

<sup>1171</sup> St. Anthony the Great, “On the Character of Men and on the Virtuous Life” (attributed to St. Anthony) in *The Philokalia: The Complete Text, Volume I*, trans., G. E. H. Palmer et al., eds., Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain, and Makarios of Corinth (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979) 49: p. 336.

<sup>1172</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 35.1: p. 146.

<sup>1173</sup> Aphrahat, *Select Demonstrations* 22.8 (NPNF II/13:405).



**1367. Why does the Lord not abolish physical death for His faithful in this world?**

Some might ask: Why does the Lord not abolish physical death for His faithful here, so that death cannot work in them after they have risen from the dead through the Lord's death and His resurrection, and thus they would live forever without their souls separating from their bodies?

**First:** God does not permit us to remain in this body forever, **so that we might not focus our eyes on earthly things**, but instead, raise our hope to eternal things. For "If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable" (1 Cor. 15:19). The Lord ascended to heaven draw our gaze upwards, that we might look forward to our personal encounter with God, for God Himself, by Him, and in Him, that He may be all in all [1 Cor. 15:28].

**Second: So that our freedom to choose faith may be apparent. St. Macarius the Great** says, "If the man were immortal, and his body exempt from corruption, the whole world, beholding the strange fact that Christian men's bodies were incorruptible, would come over to the good by a kind of compulsion, not by a voluntary decision. In order that the freedom of will which God gave man at the beginning might once for all be shewn and might abide, providence orders these matters, and bodily dissolution takes place, that it may be at the man's discretion to turn to the good or to the bad."<sup>1174</sup>

**Third: So that we may not be concerned about the death of the flesh but rather about the death of the spirit.** According to **St. Ambrose**, "The Lord said concerning St. John the Apostle: 'If I will that he remain till I come' (John 21:22). We do not think that this refers to John alone, but it is an invitation addressed generally to many. The Lord does not rule out the death of the body, but that of the spirit. For there are dead people who live, and there are living people who are dead. For example, the woman who lived in pleasure and was dead while she lived (1 Tim. 5:6). And those about whom it was written: 'Let death seize them; let them go down alive into hell' (Ps. 55:15). There are some who go down alive into hell, for by sin they go and dwell in the place of death. Conversely, the living are those whose life does not end with physical death, such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; whom we know are alive by the authority of the divine word: 'The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob ... God is not God of the dead, but of the living' (Matt. 22:32)."

**Fourth: Our Lord Jesus has not cheated us.** According to the martyr **St. Cyprian**, "For he who [spiritually] wars for God, dearest brethren, ought to acknowledge himself as one who, placed in the heavenly camp, already hopes for divine things, so that we may have no trembling at the storms and whirlwinds of the world, and no disturbance, since the Lord had foretold that these would come. With the exhortation of His fore-seeing word, instructing, and teaching, and preparing, and strengthening the people of His Church for all endurance of

<sup>1174</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 15.39–40: pp. 125–126.

things to come, He predicted and said that wars, and famines, and earthquakes, and pestilences would arise in each place; and lest an unexpected and new dread of mischiefs should shake us, He previously warned us that adversity would increase more and more in the last times. ‘Behold, the very things occur which were spoken; and since those occur which were foretold before, whatever things were promised will also follow; as the Lord Himself promises, saying, But when you see all these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand’ (Luke 21:31). The kingdom of God, beloved brethren, is beginning to be at hand.”<sup>1175</sup>

**Fifth: So that the body may be formed again without sin.** St. Gregory of Nyssa is of the opinion that the body must die if it is to be formed anew and restored to its original state without any of the sin that accompanied it during its life on earth. He likens the human body to an earthen vessel into the very material of which poison has infiltrated. It must be shattered and treated to remove all traces of the poison, and then re-molded if it is to be restored to its original state when it was safe to use and devoid of poison. This is all through God’s immense love for us, here in this world, through the blood of the Lord Christ. We are sanctified in our entirety; although the war of the flesh with sin remains, which is why we remain in need of being completely remade through the merits of the precious blood.<sup>1176</sup>

**Sixth: The Lord has changed the very concept of death.** Once our Christ willingly accepted death for the salvation of the world, it became no longer a punishment that terrifies the believer, but rather a sign of the love that he desires. A believer accepts death for the sake of God, for the salvation of his fellow believers, for his own growth (going through it every day as a communion with the crucified Christ), and as a living promise of the eternal life. According to St. John Cassian: “Not in fear and terror, but with a spirit of hope, awaiting eternity, without dejection but with the eyes of the spirit does the believer look upon the exercise of dying daily in order to live. Thus, he sees with every breath that his spirit is being constantly renewed, as though his body is being gradually transformed from flesh into spirit ... longing to behold the last day ... he moves into a state of perfect knowledge when he sees God face to face.”<sup>1177</sup>

### **1368. Is there any possibility of repentance after death?**

How is it possible for a spirit in Hades to repent, when it has separated from the body and there is no possibility of declaring life to God and men? In the world, the body participates with the soul in faith, and they walk together in the Lord. So, the two also receive what they deserve together, whether entry into heaven, or deprivation of the vision of God.

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<sup>1175</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 7: On the Mortality 2* (ANF 5:469) amended.

<sup>1176</sup> See St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* 8–9, 16–17, 25–26, 28, 32 (NPNF II/5).

<sup>1177</sup> St. Cassian, *Institutes* 5.41.

**1369. Who carries the soul once it has departed from the body?**

In the parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus, when Lazarus died, righteous angels came and bore his soul to the bosom of Abraham (Luke 16:22). **St. John Chrysostom** says that the souls of the wicked are borne by evil angels after their death. In his twenty-second homily **St. Macarius** says that groups of demons and powers of darkness take the soul of the wicked.<sup>1178</sup> And **St. Cyril of Alexandria** remarks that at a pure soul's departure, "it is borne by holy angels through the air and ascends ... the holy angels guide the soul and present the good deeds of the soul."<sup>1179</sup>

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<sup>1178</sup> St. Macarius the Great, *Fifty Spiritual Homilies of St. Macarius the Egyptian*, trans., A. J. Mason (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921) 22: p. 171.

<sup>1179</sup> See St. Cyril of Alexandria, *On the Departure of the Soul (De Exitu Animi)* 14 (PG 77:1073).

## 2

# The Sacred Pain of Loss

### 1370. Should we ignore the sacred pain of loss?

The pain of separation is a something that is a natural part of the lived experience of every person, for God has endowed us with feelings and emotions for us to experience. Mary and Martha suffered at the passing of their brother (John 11:19), and when the Lord Christ saw them in pain, He wept (John 11:35), thus sharing in their pain.

The eulogy delivered by **St. Ambrose** at the funeral of his younger brother Satyrus reveals just how tender were the saint's feelings for his very beloved brother: "But I would rather moderate the grief than alter the affection, that the longing may rather be assuaged than lulled to sleep ... this discourse has been undertaken, as it were, for the sake of accompanying him, that I might follow in affection him departing, and embrace in mind him whom I see with my eyes. For it gives me pleasure to fix the whole gaze of my eyes on him, to encompass him with kindly endearments; while my mind is stupefied, and I feel as though he were not lost whom I am able still to see present; and I think him not dead, my services to whom I do not as yet perceive to be wanting, services to which I had devoted the whole of my life and the drawing of every breath."<sup>1180</sup>

He returned a week after his brother's death, preaching, and the message of his opening words was completely different to that of the day of the funeral: "I indulged my longing to some extent, lest too sharp remedies applied to a burning wound might rather increase than assuage the pain."<sup>1181</sup>

Similarly, **St. Augustine** left us his overwhelming feelings on the day of the passing of his mother, St. Monica, which he describes in his *Confessions*: "I pressed her eyes closed, and a huge wave of sorrow flooded my heart and flowed outward in tears, yet at the same time my eyes, under the forceful command of the mind, repressed their flow until they were quite dry. In such a struggle, I felt very bad ... For, we did not think it appropriate to mark this funeral with sorrowful tears and ejaculations: that was the usual custom in mourning the unhappy lot of the dead, or their complete extinction. But, she did not die unhappily, nor did she die altogether."<sup>1182</sup>

**St. Jerome** writes to Paula, asking her not to be overly grieved by the death of Blæsilla: "Certainly, now that we have believed in Christ, and bear Him within us, by reason of the oil of His anointing which we have received (1 John 2:27), we ought not to depart from His temple — that is, from our Christian profession — we ought not to go forth to mingle with

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<sup>1180</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.14 (NPNF II/10:163).

<sup>1181</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.1 (NPNF II/10:174).

<sup>1182</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Confessions* 9.12.29 (FOTC 21:255–256).

the unbelieving Gentiles, but always to remain within, as servants obedient to the will of the Lord.”<sup>1183</sup>

Perhaps one of the most beautiful teachings **St. Macrina** imparted to her brother **St. Gregory of Nyssa** before her death was the idea of the exultant heavenly life as a characteristic of the spiritual person. In their conversations together, they remembered their brother **St. Basil the Great**, who had passed away some years earlier. St. Gregory was deeply affected and his tears started flowing. However, she did not fall apart before his sadness; but rather diverted the conversation about their brother to one about heavenly wisdom. She lifted the heart of her brother the bishop from mere memories to fervent desire for the exalted life. She remained composed, despite her weak emaciated body, and told him that it is not appropriate for us to grieve for those who have fallen asleep as do those who have no hope. She hid her sighs and her shortness of breath to turn to the bright and joyful side of the matter. She spoke to him and answered his questions. St. Gregory says, “my soul seemed to be almost outside of human nature, uplifted as it were by her words and set down inside the heavenly sanctuaries by the guidance of her discourse.”<sup>1184</sup>

St. Gregory wrote a treatise describing his dialogue with her, which he introduces by saying: “Basil, great amongst the saints, had departed from this life to God; and the impulse to mourn for him was shared by all the churches. But his sister the Teacher was still living; and so I journeyed to her, yearning for an interchange of sympathy over the loss of her brother. My soul was right sorrow-stricken by this grievous blow, and I sought for one who could feel it equally, to mingle my tears with. But when we were in each other’s presence the sight of the Teacher awakened all my pain; for she too was lying in a state of prostration even unto death. Well, she gave in to me for a little while, like a skilful driver, in the ungovernable violence of my grief; and then she tried to check me by speaking, and to correct with the curb of her reasonings the disorder of my soul. She quoted the Apostle’s words about the duty of not being ‘grieved for them that sleep’; because only ‘men without hope’ have such feelings.”<sup>1185</sup>

As a compassionate mother, the Church shares the feelings of those who are in pain. The priests, deacons, and congregation all share the pain of the bereaved family, expressing this shared pain through the melodies that are sung in the funeral rite. But they are melodies that radiate consolation and hope. As the apostle Paul says, “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:13–14).

In 374 A. D., it seems that Amphilochios, whose son had just died, blamed his cousin **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** for not reacting appropriately to his deeply felt grief. St. Gregory,

<sup>1183</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 39.4 (NPNF II/6:52).

<sup>1184</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans., Kevin Corrigan (Wipf and Stock, 2005): p. 35.

<sup>1185</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection* (NPNF II/5:429).

who was younger in age, then wrote to Amphilochios saying, “Are you grieving? I, of course, am full of joy! Are you weeping? I, as you see, am keeping festival and glorying in the present state of things! Are you grieved because your son is taken from you and promoted to honour on account of his virtue, and do you think it a terrible misfortune that he is no longer with you to tend your old age, and, as his custom is, to bestow on you all due care and service? But it is no grief to me that my father has left me for the last journey, from which he will return to me no more, and I shall never see him again! Then I for my part do not blame you, nor do I ask you for due condolence, knowing as I do that private troubles allow no leisure for those of strangers ... you blame me, as I hear you do, and think that your son and my brother is neglected by us, or even betrayed by us, which is a still heavier charge; or that we do not recognize the loss which all his friends and relatives have suffered, and I more than all, because I had placed in him my hopes of life, and looked upon him as the only bulwark, the only good counsellor, and the only sharer of my piety ... I was prevented from meeting you again by my grief, and the honour I owed my father, and his funeral, over which I could not give anything precedence ... Now I beg you to put aside your grief, which is most unreasonable I am sure.”<sup>1186</sup>

The Christian concern with holy feelings of grief at the departure of loved ones is apparent from the letter written by **St. Gregory of Nazianzus** to **St. Gregory of Nyssa** to console him concerning Theosebia, whom he seems to have married before his ordination (though they lived celibately afterwards as siblings), although some believe Theosebia was just a deaconess who was well loved and known for her wisdom:<sup>1187</sup> “I might admire your patience and philosophy (for I had heard of it) at the departure of your holy and blessed sister, as a good and perfect man, a minister of God, who knows better than any the things both of God and man; and who regards as a very light thing that which to others would be most heavy, namely to have lived with such a soul, and to send her away and store her up in the safe garners, like a shock of the threshingfloor gathered in due season (Job 5:26), to use the words of Holy Scripture; and that in such time that she, having tasted the joys of life, escaped its sorrows through the shortness of her life; and before she had to wear mourning for you, was honoured by you with that fair funeral honour which is due to such as she. I too, believe me, long to depart, if not as you do, which were much to say, yet only less than you. But what must we feel in presence of a long prevailing law of God which has now taken my Theosebia (for I call her mine because she lived a godly life; for spiritual kindred is better than bodily), Theosebia, the glory of the church, the adornment of Christ, the helper of our generation, the hope of woman; Theosebia, the most beautiful and glorious among all the beauty of the Brethren; Theosebia, truly sacred, truly consort of a priest, and of equal honour and worthy of the Great Sacraments, Theosebia, whom all future time shall receive, resting on immortal pillars, that is, on the souls of all who have known her now, and of all who shall be hereafter.

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<sup>1186</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letters* 63 (NPNF II/7:468).

<sup>1187</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *St. Gregory, Bishop of Nyssa* (Arabic) (1993): p. 12.

And do not wonder that I often invoke her name. For I rejoice even in the remembrance of the blessed one.”<sup>1188</sup>

### 1371. How can we overcome the pain of separation?

**St. Ambrose** presents us with a wonderful and practical example of overcoming the pain of parting. He and his younger brother Satyrus were both successful lawyers and likeminded. When Ambrose was ordained Bishop of Milan, Satyrus closed his own office and requested that he be appointed in his brother’s place so that Ambrose could devote himself to the service. A few years later, on October 17, 379 A. D., Satyrus fell seriously ill and died. Ambrose was deeply affected by the death of his greatly beloved brother who was also greatly loved by many. He wrote two treatises — the first on the occasion of his brother’s funeral, and the second a week after his death — in which he expresses his emotions with complete honesty, while at the same time showing us how to overcome the pain of separation. Here are some excerpts that relay the secret of his consolation at the time he lost his brother and beyond:

- a. **He puts his vocation to share the gospel with the world first.** With complete frankness, the saint tells his congregation that he loved his brother so much that he considered his brother to be a part of himself, and that his untimely death feels like the loss of a precious treasure. Nevertheless, he considers his vocation to bear witness to his Christ, the Savior of the world, to take precedence over his own feelings for his departed brother. During his brother’s funeral eulogy, he veered his discourse from his love for his brother to the more general topic of building the kingdom of God and he expressed his desire to give his own life for the life of the people of God. His love for his brother and the bitterness of the pain of separation could not distract him from his love for the congregation: “Nothing among things of earth, dearest brethren, was more precious to me, nothing more worthy of love, nothing more dear than such a brother, but public matters come before private. And should any one enquire what was his feeling; he would rather be slain for others than live for himself, because Christ died according to the flesh for all, that we might learn not to live for ourselves alone.”<sup>1189</sup>
- i. **He thanks God who loaned him his little brother for a while and then took him back again.** Instead of mourning the death of his brother, he thanked God who gave him this blessed brother who was likeminded about life with the Lord and the service of God’s people: “To this must be added that I cannot be ungrateful to God; for I must rather rejoice that I had such a brother than grieve that I had lost a brother, for the former is a gift, the latter a debt to be paid. And so, as long as I might, I enjoyed the loan entrusted to me, now He Who deposited the pledge has taken it back. There is

<sup>1188</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letters* 197 (NPNF II/7:462).

<sup>1189</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.2 (NPNF II/10:161).

no difference between denying that a pledge has been deposited and grieving at its being returned.”<sup>1190</sup>

- j. **He elevates his thought through recollection.** He looked back upon his brother’s deep love, his willingness to close his own practice to continue in his brother’s office, and his noble qualities of love, meekness, and a love of serving others. Better still, he raised up his thoughts to imagine his brother in paradise, no longer just his brother, no longer just a member of his family, for all humanity have become his family and his brothers and sisters. Satyrus can now love everyone and pray for them. St. Ambrose feels that his brother’s passing to paradise is a passing to better state. Therefore, Ambrose considers that he has truly entered paradise. What could be more beautiful than Ambrose’s feelings of love for his brother? For St. Ambrose, Satyrus’ departure to paradise has brought them closer together, for paradise is their common inheritance.

**St. Ambrose** says, “For why should I weep for you, my most loving brother, who was thus torn from me that you might be the brother of all? For I have not lost but changed my intercourse with you; before we were inseparable in the body, now we are undivided in affection; for you remain with me, and ever will remain. And, indeed, while you were living with me, our country never tore you from me, nor did you yourself ever prefer our country to me; and now you have become surety for that other country, for I begin to be no stranger there where the better portion of myself already is.”<sup>1191</sup>

- k. **He appreciates the love his brothers and sisters showed him in a time of difficulty.** St. Ambrose speaks to his congregation as to brothers and sisters who are filled with love and affection. He says, “I feel, indeed, the deepest gratitude to you, dearest brethren, holy people, that you esteem my grief as no other than your own, that you feel this bereavement as having happened to yourselves, that you offer me the tears of the whole city, of every age, and the good wishes of every rank, with unusual affection. For this is not the grief of private sympathy, but as it were a service and offering of public good-will ... I might prefer that my brother were living, but yet public kindness is in prosperity very pleasant, and in adversity very grateful.”<sup>1192</sup>
- l. **He respects the tears of those who weep.** When St. Ambrose beheld the tears of the whole city, crying for the departure of his brother, he recalled the tears of the widows weeping over Tabitha. St. Peter prayed and asked her to rise up, and she arose and sat up (Acts 9:40). Likewise did the city weep for Satyrus who had served it. While Satyrus reposed and did not rise from the dead in this world, he will experience the resurrection of the great day of the Lord. He said, “And though he that was dead has

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<sup>1190</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.3 (NPNF II/10:161).

<sup>1191</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.6 (NPNF II/10:162) amended.

<sup>1192</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.21 (NPNF II/10:164).



not sat up on the bier, yet he has found rest in Christ; and if he have not spoken to us, yet he sees those things which are above us, and rejoices in that he now sees higher things than we.”<sup>1193</sup>

- m. **He feels that his brother was snatched away early in life to save his thought from being corrupted.** St. Ambrose says, “He had no need of being raised again for a time, him for whom the raising again for eternity is waiting. For why should he fall back into this wretched and miserable state of corruption, and return to this mournful life.”<sup>1194</sup>

Other Fathers also reflected on the passing of righteous individuals at an early age. The martyr **St. Cyprian** says, “Thus, moreover, we find that Enoch also was translated, who pleased God, as in Genesis the Holy Scripture bears witness, and says: ‘And Enoch pleased God; and afterwards he was not found, because God translated him’ (Gen. 5:24). To have been pleasing in the sight of God was thus to have merited to be translated from this contagion of the world.”<sup>1195</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “For if no one mourns for Enoch, who was translated (Gen. 5:24) when the world was at peace and wars were not raging, but the people rather congratulated him, as Scripture says concerning him: ‘He was taken away, lest that wickedness should alter his understanding’ (Wisd. of Sol. 4:11), with how much greater justice must this now be said, when to the dangers of the world is added the uncertainty of life. He was taken away that he might not fall into the hands of the barbarians; he was taken away that he might not see the ruin of the whole earth, the end of the world, the burial of his relatives, the death of fellow citizens; lest, lastly, which is more bitter than any death, he should see the pollution of the holy virgins and widows.”<sup>1196</sup>

- n. **He thinks of the death of his brother not as a loss of life, but as a deliverance from the fear and troubles that threatened him.** Addressing his departed brother, St. Ambrose says, “So then, brother, I esteem you happy both in the beauty of your life and in the opportuneness of your death. For you were snatched away not from us but from dangers; you did not lose life but escaped the fear of threatening troubles.”<sup>1197</sup>
- o. Finally, St. Ambrose tells his brother that **though Satyrus will not return, Ambrose will go to him.** In life, they shared many things in common; and in eternity, they will again share.<sup>1198</sup>

<sup>1193</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.29 (NPNF II/10:166).

<sup>1194</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.30 (NPNF II/10:166) amended.

<sup>1195</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 7: On the Mortality* 23 (ANF 5:474).

<sup>1196</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.30 (NPNF II/10:166).

<sup>1197</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.31 (NPNF II/10:166) amended.

<sup>1198</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 1.79 (NPNF II/10:173).





### 3

## Millennialism (Chiliasm)<sup>1199</sup>

The Book of Revelation speaks symbolically about the state of the Church during her struggle on earth until the day she meets our Lord Jesus her Bridegroom. It then begins to tell us of her heavenly matrimonial home — that is, the eternal kingdom, prepared for us since the foundation of the world. This kingdom is not alien to the true believer but is rather an extension of what he enjoys here on earth as a token of heaven, and it is what he lives by in paradise from the moment of his departure. Thus, in the last three chapters, the book begins to speak about the kingdom in which we live here, and about the authority that we have over Satan and his soldiers as the beginning of an eternal journey and a heavenly meeting with our heavenly Father face to face.

#### **1372. What is meant by Satan being bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–3)?**

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while” (Rev. 20:1–3) This angel who came down from heaven, has authority over hell, and is able to lay hold of and bind Satan is a symbol of the angel of the covenant: our Lord Jesus (Mal. 3:1) who came down from heaven and was nailed to the cross for the sake of humanity, having wiped out the handwriting of iniquity that was written against us. Thus, the devil has no place in us, and thus the believer is able to trample on Satan and his power. And as the Holy Bible says:<sup>1200</sup>

“... now the ruler of this world will be cast out” (John 12:31).

“Having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col. 2:14–15).

“And He said to them, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. Behold, I give you the authority to trample on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you’” (Luke 10:18–19).

“Because the ruler of this world is judged” (John 16:11).

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<sup>1199</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Book of Revelation*, trans., Victoria Malaty and Ramzy Malaty (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 1996): pp. 219–226.

<sup>1200</sup> See Fr. Pishoy Kamel, *The Millennium (Our Orthodox Church Faith, no. 3)* (Arabic).

There is much evidence in the New Testament that reassures our souls; not that the character of the devil has been restricted, but rather that his authority has. For he is no longer able to rule over a person, so long as he does not have a part in that person's heart. But if a person chooses to implant something of the devil into his own heart, then he himself has surrendered himself to the enemy. Many are the writings of the early Church that give the believer hope and courage to fight the devil without fear or unrest, reassuring him that with the cross he binds and destroys Satan.

**St. Augustine** says, "It was then for the binding of this strong one that the apostle saw in the Apocalypse 'an angel coming down from heaven, having the key of the abyss, and a chain in his hand. And he laid hold,' he says, 'on the dragon, that old serpent, which is called the devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years,'—that is, bridled and restrained his power so that he could not seduce and gain possession of those who were to be freed."<sup>1201</sup>

The duration, "a thousand years," can be understood in two ways:

- a. The struggling Church lives in the day of "the Lord"; that is, the Sabbath of rest. This is the day which began with the resurrection of the Lord and never sets, such that the saints enjoy endless rest as they pass from their strife to eternity, the extension of their lives here. A day with the Lord is as a thousand years [2 Pet. 3:8]; thus the duration of this "day" is called "a thousand years."
- b. The thousand years refer to the fulfilment of time since the resurrection of the Lord; that is, since the Lord entered the strong man's house and plundered his goods (Mark 3:27), enabling his children to strive against Satan, who no longer has power until the coming of the antichrist when the devil will be released "to deceive, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24).

However, a few denominations scorn this interpretation, asking: How can you say that Satan is bound when we see him working? Surely, he will be bound in the future? Others of our Protestant brothers, especially Lutherans, have refuted this view, as we shall now see.

For example, **Charles Erdman** says that our Lord and His disciples used words stronger than 'bondage' and 'imprisonment' to describe the effect of Christ's saving work on Satan, for He said, "The ruler of this world is judged" [John 16:11]. **Joseph S. Exell**, in *The Biblical Illustrator*, presents the views of many Protestant interpreters who vehemently insist that, for the true believer, Satan is presently bound.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, "since if we would but only change, we have Him to assist us. And if you are desirous to become good, there is none to hinder us; or rather there is one to hinder us, the devil, yet has he no power, so long as you choose what is best, and so attract

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<sup>1201</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.7 (NPNF I/2:426–427).

God to your aid. But if you are not yourself willing, but start aside, how shall He protect you? Since not of necessity or compulsion, but of your own will, He wills you to be saved.”<sup>1202</sup>

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “The soul is self-governed: and though the devil can suggest, he has not the power to compel against the will. He pictures to you the thought of fornication: if you will, you accept it; if you will not, you reject. For if you were a fornicator by necessity, then for what cause did God prepare hell? If you were a doer of righteousness by nature and not by will, wherefore did God prepare crowns of ineffable glory? The sheep is gentle, but never was it crowned for its gentleness: since its gentle quality belongs to it not from choice but by nature.”<sup>1203</sup>

**St. Mark the Ascetic** says, “The thoughts of the devil are merely impressions on the mind of an evil thing (or action). What enables them to take control of us, or at least, to approach our minds, is the weakness of our faith. For, having received the commandment, let us cast away from us every entanglement and guard our hearts with utter vigilance (Prov. 4:23). Let us seek the kingdom of God that is within us, for the mind has abandoned the heart and abandoned the goal for which we strive, and thus cleared the way now for the fantasies of the devil, and the mind has become lax and admits any evil counsel. But until now, the devil has no authority to manipulate our thoughts, or else he would never have had mercy on us but would have inserted into our minds every kind of evil thought, depriving us of any good. No, he is limited to merely being able to offer false counsel at the beginning of every thought, and it is our heart that chooses in which direction it will tend: whether to tend towards his counsel, or to the counsel of God, for these two are contradictory.”<sup>1204</sup>

**St. Dorotheos of Gaza** says, “This is the power of the mystery, and this is the reason for which Christ died: to bring us, the dead, back to life; and to bring us back from Hades to His love and compassion. And now we have the ability to return again to Paradise, and our enemy no longer has any power as he had before, Satan no longer takes us as his slaves.”

And **St. Irenaeus** says, “For the Lord, through means of suffering, ‘ascending into the lofty place, led captivity captive, gave gifts to men’ (Ps. 68:18; Eph. 4:8), and conferred on those that believe in Him the power ‘to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and on all the power of the enemy’ (Luke 10:19; Mark 16:17–18), that is, of the leader of apostasy.”<sup>1205</sup>

### **1373. What is meant by the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4–6)?**

“And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their

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<sup>1202</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 22.6 (NPNF I/10:151–152).

<sup>1203</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 4.21 (NPNF II/7:24) amended.

<sup>1204</sup> Abba Mark the Ascetic: Selected instructions from his other discourses, 21.

<sup>1205</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 2.20.3 (ANF 1:388).

foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4–6). Here we are told of a first resurrection and a second resurrection, although nowhere else in the Holy Bible do we find the phrase “the second resurrection.” So, what does the first resurrection mean?

We know that sin entered the world, so death reigned over all souls, and so we came to be such that although we live in the body our souls are dead because they are separated from the source of their life, God. Thus, our Lord came to offer to us a *spiritual* resurrection for our souls, before our bodies and our souls enjoy a *general* resurrection on the Day of Judgment.

The Lord says, “Most assuredly, I say to you, the hour is coming, **and now is**, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). Concerning this resurrection, the apostle says, “buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were **raised with Him** through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead” (Col. 2:12). And through repentance we also taste the resurrection while we are still striving: “Awake, you who sleep, arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light” (Eph. 5:14).

This is a matter of continual experience in the daily life of the believer. For the apostle says, in a manner indicating a continuous act, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death” (Phil. 3:10). Therefore, with all certainty we say that the Church in its striving and despite the pain she suffers, lives in the millennium, the first resurrection, savoring the token of heavenly things.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “He was the last item of the reasonable creation. But the feet became the head, and by means of the first-fruits, were raised to the royal throne . . . But God made the gain greater than the loss, and brought our nature to the royal throne. Therefore Paul cries out and says, ‘He raised us up with him, and made us to sit with him, on his right hand in the heavenly places, that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness towards us’ (Eph. 2:6–7). What do you say? the thing has already happened and has an end, and do you say ‘in order that he might show to the ages to come?’ Has he not shown? He has already shown, but not to all men, but to me who am faithful, but the unbelieving has not yet seen the wonder. But then, in that day the whole nature of man will come forward, and will wonder at that which has been done, but especially will it be more manifest to us.”<sup>1206</sup>

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<sup>1206</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Three Homilies on the Power of Man to Resist the Devil* 1.2 (NPNF I/9:179–180) amended.

Therefore, those who bear the cross with our Lord Jesus as witnesses to Him until death enjoy the first resurrection here; while the rest of those who are dead in spirit, who do not accept the faith, do not enjoy the first resurrection and fall under the eternal second death (Rev. 21:8).

Again, we affirm the words of **St. Augustine**: “Of this judgment He went on to say, ‘And has given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of man’ [John 5:27]. Here He shows that He will come to judge in that flesh in which He had come to be judged ... This judgment He uses here in the same sense as a little before, when He says, ‘He that hears my word, and believes on Him who sent me, has everlasting life, and shall not come into *judgment*, but is passed from death to life’ [John 5:24]; *i.e.*, by having a part in the first resurrection, by which a transition from death to life is made in this present time, he shall not come into damnation.”<sup>1207</sup> Thus, the millennial reign of Christ on earth actually began with Jesus Christ Himself in the Church, and the saints now have a share in that reign.

**Pope Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “For the Word being clothed in the flesh, as has many times been explained, every bite of the serpent began to be utterly staunches from out it; and whatever evil sprung from the motions of the flesh, to be cut away, and with these death also was abolished, the companion of sin, as the Lord Himself says: ‘The prince of this world comes, and finds nothing in Me’ (John 14:30); and ‘For this end was He manifested,’ as John has written, ‘that He might destroy the works of the devil’ (1 John 3:8). And these being destroyed from the flesh, we all were thus liberated by the kinship of the flesh [*i.e.*, the flesh of Christ], and for the future were joined, even we, to the Word.”<sup>1208</sup>

**St. Gregory the Wonderworker** says, “For since the holy Virgin, in the life of the flesh, was in possession of the incorruptible citizenship, and walked as such in all manner of virtues, and lived a life more excellent than man’s common standard; therefore the Word that comes from God the Father thought it meet to assume the flesh, and endue the perfect man from her, in order that in the same flesh in which sin entered into the world, and death by sin, sin might be condemned in the flesh, and that the tempter of sin might be overcome in the burying of the holy body, and that therewith also the beginning of the resurrection might be exhibited, and life eternal instituted in the world, and fellowship established for men with God the Father.”<sup>1209</sup>

### **1374. Why do some of the writings of the early Church speak of a literal millennium?**

Our discussion so far of the interpretation of this text that speaks of the millennium and the first resurrection has not yet touched upon a certain strain of thought that can be found in some writings of the Fathers of the first three centuries — a literal interpretation of the text

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<sup>1207</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.6 (NPNF I/2:425) amended.

<sup>1208</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *Four Discourses Against the Arians* 2.69 (NPNF II/4:386).

<sup>1209</sup> St. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Four Homilies* 2 (ANF 6:61).



according to which the Lord will reign upon the earth with the faithful in a temporal dominion for a period of a thousand years. We need to distinguish between that which is found in ancient writings on this topic and that which is found in contemporary writings. We know that the Jews had their own materialistic views that caused them to reject our Lord Jesus because He refused any temporal dominion. And until today, some of them still await the coming of the Messiah whose reign will establish a temporal dominion over the whole world. This view entered the Church at its inception via two routes:

- a. Jews who became Christian and brought with them their materialistic interpretations.<sup>1210</sup> This view is found interspersed among writings and sermons of this period. Thus we find, for example, the Church Father **Papias**, a man of the first century, envisioning a temporal and material kingdom inaugurated with a resurrection and lasting one thousand years. In it, grape vines grow, each vine bearing ten thousand branches and each branch bearing ten thousand twigs, etc.,<sup>1211</sup> and other things that materialistic Jewish thought naively accepts. **Eusebius** says that Papias fell into this materialistic approach due to his lack of understanding of the apostolic writings — he failed to appreciate that their sayings were figurative (spiritual). The similar views of some of the Church Fathers after Papias can be traced back to him,<sup>1212</sup> views that Eusebius calls “mythical.”<sup>1213</sup> **St. Augustine** also fell into this error at first, but later realized his mistake.
- b. In reading **Justin’s** dialogue with Trypho the Jew,<sup>1214</sup> we cannot help but notice Justin’s enthusiasm and zeal to show that all the promises and blessings the Jews received were completed and fulfilled in the Church of the New Testament. Thus, he tried to prove that prophecies such as Isa. 65:17–25 and Mic. 4:1–7 are “transferred” to Christians.

We find the same approach in **Tertullian’s** dialogues with the Jews. Although he agrees that all the Old Testament promises have been transferred to the Church and that the Jews were deprived of every blessing, he nonetheless goes back and also transfers materialistic Jewish thought to the Church.

### 1375. What was the position of the School of Alexandria on this view in the second century?

Millennialism was generally not considered as a topic of itself, nor was much attention given to it; but the School of Alexandria quickly became aware that this matter could be

<sup>1210</sup> See St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80–81 (ANF 1:239–240).

<sup>1211</sup> See Papias, *Fragments* 4 (ANF 1:153).

<sup>1212</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.12–13 (NPNF II/1:172). See also Fr. Pishoy Kamel, “The Millennial Reign,” in *St. Mark’s Magazine* (Arabic).

<sup>1213</sup> Eusebius Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.11 (NPNF II/1:172).

<sup>1214</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80–91 (ANF 1:239–245).

dangerous. It was almost as though they peered into the future and saw what we see happening today — how this erroneous doctrine represents the dangerous central ideology of some denominations, such as the Adventists. Thus, the scholar **Origen** set out in the second century to oppose this view, and **Pope Dionysius of Alexandria** followed him in the third century in refuting the idea of a literal interpretation of the Book of Revelation. By the end of the fourth century, this view had disappeared entirely in the Church of Alexandria. Elsewhere, **St. Augustine**, realizing his mistake, made clear the danger of a literal interpretation of the thousand years, countering it with the power of irrefutable argument.

### **1376. What is the teaching of the Holy Bible and sacred tradition regarding Millennialism?**

**First: St. Jerome.** In his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew 19:29–30 he makes a distinction between the discourse of some of the Fathers on Millennialism and that of those who fell into false teachings on the matter. He says, “Of the early Fathers who supported this doctrine, none of them made any reference to the continuance of procreation during the messianic reign. In contrast, the view of the heretic Cerinthus was that the millennium would be a time of material pleasures in which procreation continues.”<sup>1215</sup> Here we may pause to ponder: if the millennium is an encounter with the Lord Christ as a King who saves the righteous from the great tribulation, then many questions remain concerning our salvation through the crucified and risen Christ who ascended into the heavens, including the following:

- a. If the Lord Jesus Christ said to Pontus Pilate that His kingdom is not of this world (John 18:36), will He return and reign with the believers on the earth?
- b. What could we say about the words of the apostle Paul: “if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together” (Rom. 8:17)? How can those who are born and die during the thousand years and therefore never suffer with the Lord be glorified with the Lord forever?
- c. If the Lord Christ will reign on earth and preserve His faithful people, why did He say that for the sake of the elect He would shorten the days of the antichrist that they might not stray (Mark 13:20)?

St. Jerome discusses these issues and points out the error of this teaching more than fifty times, especially in his commentaries on the Prophets. He often draws a connection between Jews who supported a Messianic kingdom on earth and Christians who advocated this teaching.

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<sup>1215</sup> St Jerome, *Commentary on Matthew* Introduction (FOTC 117:42).

**Second: St. Augustine.** In his book *The City of God*<sup>1216</sup> he says that the period between the creation and the coming of the Lord Christ is about six thousand years; and since a thousand years with the Lord are as one day (2 Pet. 3:8), this period refers to the six days of creation, with the period from the resurrection of Christ to the general resurrection being the seventh day or the Lord's Day. Thus, the thousand years is the period in which the faithful experience the resurrection in their inner lives. Accordingly, St. Augustine thinks of the present life of the righteous on earth as a token of eternity, since their souls enjoy the sweetness of the Resurrection. On this basis, he argues that those who see the millennium as a kingdom on earth are not thinking spiritually.

The second interpretation of Millennialism according to St. Augustine is that the Lord Christ promised that he who abandons everything will receive a hundredfold in return (Matt. 19:29). So, if the things a person owns are symbolized by the number 10, then having abandoned them, he will receive in return hundredfold, that is, 10 x 100, which is 1000. In this way, St. Augustine derives an interpretation of the number 1000 whereby it refers to all true believers who live in the expectation of heaven, are found in every generation, and receive the divine promise. In vain does the devil attempt to infiltrate their hearts.

St. Augustine also notes that Satan was cast out and bound for a thousand years. The seal set upon him [Rev. 20:3] indicates that during this time in which faithful experience the token of heaven, Satan has no authority over the striving children of God. His being cast into the bottomless pit and being shut up therein indicates that during the thousand years no one is able to know those who are with Satan and those who are with the Savior. If we see a fallen person, we should not judge him, for he may yet offer sincere repentance. Likewise, we may think a person is righteous and yet his life may end with him falling into sin. But God knows those who are His (2 Tim. 2:19).

### **1377. What Millennialist doctrines do some contemporary denominations teach?**

Some denominations cast Millennialism as their central doctrine and on this basis, predict specific dates for the return of Christ to reign over the world. Here we find that there are differences between the writings of the early Church and the writings of our contemporary authors.

- a. In the writings of the early Church, the millennium only appears incidentally, as a secondary argument to motivate the main argument that the Jews, having rejected Jesus, have been deprived of all the promises of the Old Testament, as we see when

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<sup>1216</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God, Books XVII–XXII* 20.7 (FOTC 24:264–269). Cf. St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VII: Sermons 230–272B*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1993) 259.2: pp. 177–178.

**St. Justin Martyr** cautions, “many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.”<sup>1217</sup>

- b. Nonetheless, some Protestant denominations advocate this idea on the following grounds:

**First:** The Lord Christ comes to reign over His saints<sup>1218</sup> before the “man of sin” comes and initiates the great tribulation, so the saints do not live through that tribulation. Then He returns and appears again to destroy the antichrist.

**Second:** Israel will believe in the Lord Christ, but they will remain a body distinct from the Church;<sup>1219</sup> and Jerusalem will expand and be adorned and become a center for the Jewish people who will rule the world.

**Third:** The Temple of Jerusalem will be rebuilt and animal sacrifices will once again be offered ...

Rather than entering into a debate over this framework myself, I would prefer to present the responses to this view of some of my Protestant brethren:

- a. **Erdmann**<sup>1220</sup> argues that the principles on which the idea of a material millennium is built contradict each other and depart from the spirit of the Holy Bible.
- b. In his book, *Worthy is the Lamb*, **Summers** argues that a system of eschatology, theology, or philosophy of history cannot be built on a shaky literal interpretation of just three verses (i.e., Rev. 20:4–6).<sup>1221</sup>
- c. **H. Monod**<sup>1222</sup> rejects the literal interpretation of the millennium, and his reasoning can be summarized thus:

**First:** Spiritual and symbolic interpretations are more in harmony with the style of the prophets in general and especially with the Book of Revelation. Thus, when we

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<sup>1217</sup> St. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 80 (ANF 1:239). Translator’s Note: That is, while Justin and some Christians believe in an earthly millennium, other pious Christians do not. It is not a matter of central importance to Christians, but Justin discusses it only in the context of his argument to the Jewish Trypho that it is Christians who inherit the promises of the Old Testament rather than the Jews.

<sup>1218</sup> In her book *Revealing the Future*, Laura B. Hamilton believes that those who will reign with Christ are those who submit to Him, but among them will be those who submit to Him with their bodies but not their hearts. At the coming of the antichrist, those who have truly submitted will be revealed in distinction to the hypocrites.

<sup>1219</sup> Charles R. Erdman, *The Revelation of John: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1936): p. 146.

<sup>1220</sup> Charles R. Erdman, *The Revelation of John: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1936): p. 144–146.

<sup>1221</sup> Ray Summers, *Worthy Is the Lamb* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1951): pp. 205–206.

<sup>1222</sup> Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Vol. 17, Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978).

read that a church is a candlestick and its minister is a star, we cannot possibly interpret this literally.

**Second:** Note that St. John speaks only of the “souls” that revive again and reign with Christ [which souls alone cannot do]. He does not speak of “souls and bodies.”

**Third:** A literal interpretation is not in harmony with other texts in the Bible that speak of the general resurrection. Nowhere else do we read of the resurrection occurring twice or at two different periods. But from Dan. 12:2; John 5:28–29; and 1 Thess. 4:16–17, it is quite clear that the resurrection of the dead — for the righteous and the wicked — is immediately followed by judgment and eternal life.

**Fourth:** It is impossible to understand how returning to earth brings happiness to the righteous who died in faith and were gathered with the rest of God’s people. The error of the Jews lies in their desire for a temporal reign of the Messiah, and those who believe in a literal millennium fall into the same error.

**Fifth:** If we accept a literal interpretation, what would happen to those born during the millennium? Currently, by death (physically), the faithful are saved: they die in peace, because they leave behind trials and misery to go to the Lord; but this would not be the case of those born in the millennium. He asks how it is that those born during the millennium could carry the cross with the Lord Jesus, given it is a kingdom in which they marry and are married, and is not a narrow way?

**Sixth:** This text is the only passage in the Holy Bible in which it is said that the first resurrection will be before the end of the world, while many prophecies talk about the resurrection without mentioning any resurrection of the body in the literal physical form. Which makes more sense: to interpret the entire Bible, especially these prophecies, in the light of this one mysterious passage; or to interpret the mysterious passage in the light of the many clear prophecies in the Bible?

Finally, Monod draws this conclusion: “the millennium, is to be understood in a spiritual sense, and that the subject is the authority which He will exercise over souls by the progress of the gospel ... as regards conversion and as regards salvation. Indeed, since that glorious reign of Christ is a spiritual reign, since it will essentially consist in the submission of hearts to the gospel of Jesus Christ.”

- d. Gibb<sup>1223</sup> rejects the idea of a temporal millennium, refuting the idea that the resurrected body will reign physically and visibly. He also says that the souls of the martyrs are alive and that they experience a kind of resurrection when they taste a kind of rest and a state of authority and vitality. They exercise a kind of reign with the Lord for the sake of the pains and toils they endured for the Lord’s sake. The

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<sup>1223</sup> Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator: Vol. 17, Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1978): pp. 275–276.

saints of the Lord Jesus reign with Him in a glorious, immaterial way beyond our present comprehension. He calls those who believe in a literal millennium materialists and skeptics and calls for us to have a more accurate hope rather than this kind of material hope in vain matters. It is better for a person to seek everything for the sake of Christ in order to gain Christ and be found in Him, to benefit from the heavenly kingdom — knowing that the cross is the way to the crown — rather than to seek material things.

Finally, he says that rejecting a temporal millennial kingdom instils comfort in the faithful, when they take off their earthly tent. They know that their souls will not sleep in a state of insensible darkness while their bodies rest in the dust; indeed, death is gain for them.

These are a few excerpts from the writings of our Protestant brethren in which they vehemently attack the doctrine of a temporal millennium.

### **1378. What does the release of Satan at the end of times mean?**

“Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison” (Rev. 20:7). That is, when the time of the antichrist comes, he will be granted the power and authority of the devil to arise and destroy, and even, if he can, to mislead the elect. Thus it is said that Satan will be released from Hades his prison, and will appear to work with a power never seen before. The Book of Revelation continues, saying that he “will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Rev. 20:8–10).

Here we find two interpretations of this text:

**The first interpretation:** Certain tribes, subject to one of the ten kings who will be contemporaries of the antichrist, will gather in the city of Jerusalem to war against Elijah and Enoch and the rest of the Church in Jerusalem, but God will send fire to burn them. Some believe that “Gog and Magog” do not refer to specific tribes, but to all those peoples who have strayed and whose soldiers gather to oppose the Church; but God chastises them with heavenly fire.

**The second interpretation:** In **St. Augustine’s**<sup>1224</sup> view, the war here is a spiritual war, rather than a physical one. The antichrist and his supporters Gog and Magog will use all methods of cruelty, violence, and deception to kill the saints as they attempt to force them to

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<sup>1224</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.11 (NPNF I/2:432).

stray from their faith. However, God will support the two faithful witnesses Elijah and Enoch with the heavenly fire of the Holy Spirit that burns error, casts out fear, and sustains faith. By this fire the faithful will stand fast during the days of the two witnesses, and even more so after their martyrdom and the killing of the antichrist, and the Holy Spirit will rebuke many of those who followed the antichrist and resisted the Church that they might repent and turn from their evil. As for the devil, his end will be with the beast and the false prophet, when the wicked are cast into the lake burning with fire.

### 1379. What is the millennial kingdom? And what is its true meaning?

The Book of Revelation tells us that our Lord Jesus will rule on earth for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–15). During this period, Satan, who had previously entered into a battle against the Church, would be bound; and he, his angels, and his followers will be defeated in the Battle of Armageddon. Some have fallen into erroneous interpretations here because they failed to distinguish between the symbolic material contained in the Book of Revelation and the literal, material interpretation of that material. **Origen**,<sup>1225</sup> **St. Dionysius of Alexandria**,<sup>1226</sup> **Methodius of Olympia**,<sup>1227</sup> **St. Basil of Caesarea**,<sup>1228</sup> **St. Gregory Nazianzus**,<sup>1229</sup> **St. Epiphanius of Salamis**,<sup>1230</sup> **St. Jerome**,<sup>1231</sup> and **St. Augustine**<sup>1232</sup> all resisted this incorrect thought.

This literal interpretation is adopted by the Jehovah’s Witnesses, who believe that Christ will reign materially for a thousand years and establish an earthly kingdom. They also reject the doctrines of the Holy Trinity, the sacraments of the Church, and the veneration of saints.

We need to understand that the Book of Revelation hides divine mysteries behind the veil of symbols. This leads us to the following conclusions:

**First:** It is clear that the period of a thousand years is symbolic. St. Peter says, “But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Pet. 3:8). The biblical millennium refers to the victory of the Church and the fulfilment of the message of the Gospel throughout the whole world. It is a prophecy of the establishment of God’s reign over hearts, where Satan is bound and greatly weakened by people’s acceptance of the true faith and the enlightenment of all nations by the Gospel in the last times.

<sup>1225</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.11.2 (ANF 4:297).

<sup>1226</sup> Eusebius of Pamphili, *Ecclesiastical History* 7.24.1–4 (NPNF II/1:308; PG 20:693).

<sup>1227</sup> St. Methodius of Olympus, *The Banquet of the Ten Virgins* 9.1–3 (ANF 6:344–346).

<sup>1228</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *Letters 186–368* 263 (FOTC 28:241; PG 32:980).

<sup>1229</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letters* 102 Also to Cledonius (NPNF II/7:443–445; PG 37:197).

<sup>1230</sup> St. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Against Heresies* 77.36–39 (PG 42:697).

<sup>1231</sup> St. Jerome, *Commentary on Isaiah* 9.33 (ACW 68:472).

<sup>1232</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.7–9 (NPNF I/2:426–431).

**Second:** This millennium will be brought to an end by Satan when his chains will be released for a while in the time of the antichrist; but the Lord Christ, in His second coming, will judge Satan and his evil angels and servants. After the Last Judgment, believers will enjoy the all-blessed kingdom of God, while unbelievers who insisted on not repenting will be expelled.

**Third:** When the governor Pilate accused the Lord Christ of setting Himself up as a king, the Lord did not deny that He was a king, but said to him, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Is it plausible that the King of kings and the Lord of lords (Rev. 19:16) will change His mind and make Himself the king of an earthly kingdom?

**Fourth:** The Book of Revelation warns us against straying from its words: “For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part from the Book of Life, from the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book. He who testifies to these things says: ‘Surely I am coming quickly.’ Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus! The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen” (Rev. 22:18–21).





## 4

### The Two Comings and the Rapture

The Second Coming of Christ was a topic of great interest the early Church as is evident from the Church's engagement with the Word of God [Bible] and her worship. The Church saw this future event as the fulfilment of human history and its ultimate end; when the Lord Christ shall appear on the clouds and will carry His Church — including all the faithful from Adam to those alive at the end of the age — to the bosom of the Father so that they may enjoy communion in eternal glory. This is the Great Day of the Lord as the Holy Bible calls it, when the eyes of all who are in heaven or on earth will be opened to discover the summit of sublime divine Love, given to holy humanity who will enter into a sublime and eternal fellowship with the inhabitants of heaven. And those in heaven together with those on earth will rejoice in the love that unites them all.<sup>1233</sup>

We preach two comings of our Lord Christ. The first was when the Word of God was incarnate to give us free salvation through the cross. The second will be when He will come again in great glory. The first coming heralded the salvation of humanity and the second coming brings with it the crown of His eternal kingdom.

#### 1380. What do the Holy Bible and Church Tradition say about the two comings?

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** writes on the second coming of Christ:

*“I beheld till thrones were placed, and one that was ancient of days did sit, and then, I saw in a vision of the night, and behold one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, etc. (Dan. 7:9, 13).*

“We preach not one advent only of Christ, but a second also, far more glorious than the former. For the former gave a view of His patience; but the latter brings with it the crown of a divine kingdom. For all things, for the most part, are twofold in our Lord Jesus Christ: a twofold generation; one, of God, before the ages; and one, of a Virgin, at the close of the ages: His descents twofold; one, the unobserved, *like rain on a fleece* (Ps. 72:6); and a second His open coming, which is to be. In His former advent, He was wrapped in swaddling clothes in the manger; in His second, He *covers Himself with light as with a garment* (Ps. 104:2). In His first coming, *He endured the Cross, despising shame* (Heb. 12:2); in His second, He comes attended by a host of Angels, receiving glory ... The Saviour comes, not to be judged again, but to judge them who judged Him; He who before held His peace when judged (Matt. 26:63), shall remind the transgressors who did those daring deeds at the Cross, and shall say, *These things have you done, and I kept silence* (Ps. 50:21).

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<sup>1233</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Divine Love* (Arabic) Books 1–8, second edition, revised and updated (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George's Coptic Orthodox Church, 2010): pp. 1157–1158.

“And concerning these two comings, Malachi the Prophet says, *And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple* (Mal. 3:1–3); behold one coming. And again of the second coming he says, *And the Messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. Behold, He comes, says the Lord Almighty. But who shall abide the day of His coming? or who shall stand when He appears? Because He comes in like a refiner’s fire, and like fullers’ lye; and He shall sit as a refiner and purifier.* And immediately after the Saviour Himself says, *And I will draw near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulteresses, and against those who swear falsely in My Name* (Mal. 3:5), and the rest ...

“Paul also knew these two comings, when writing to Titus and saying, *The grace of God has appeared which brings salvation unto all men, instructing us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, and godly, and righteously in this present world; looking for the blessed hope, and appearing of the glory of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ* (Titus 2:11). You see how he spoke of a first, for which he gives thanks; and of a second, to which we look forward.”<sup>1234</sup>

The first coming of the Lord Christ for the salvation of the world changed our understanding of The Day of the Lord [the second coming]. For us it has become the day of our joyful eternal wedding. No longer is the day of His second coming a matter of dread — it has become our heart’s desire, to which we look forward with joy and exultation. One of the principal exercises in the lives of the desert Fathers — and also in the lives of those who take their salvation seriously — is the continual remembrance of the last day when the Lord will come, and preparation for the experience of the heavenly glories and the divine embrace.

The martyr **St. Cyprian** says, “What will be the glory and how great the joy to be admitted to see God, to be honoured to receive with Christ, your Lord God, the joy of eternal salvation and light—to greet Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the patriarchs, and prophets, and apostles, and martyrs—to rejoice with the righteous and the friends of God in the kingdom of heaven, with the pleasure of immortality given to us—to receive there what neither eye has seen, nor ear heard, neither has entered into the heart of man!”<sup>1235</sup>

**St. Cyril the Great** says, “And that we ought to look for the coming again of Christ from heaven—for He will come in the glory of the Father with the holy angels ... For Christ will return as from a feast: by which is plainly shown, that God ever dwells in festivals, such as befit Him. For above, there is no sadness whatsoever.”<sup>1236</sup>

In the second coming of the Lord Christ, He will embrace us as a heavenly bride, the creation of His own hands, who will share in eternal glory with Him. St. Cyril the Great says, “*They will go up from the land* [Hos 1:11], that is, they, too, will live the life of the saints.

<sup>1234</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.1–2 (NPNF II/7:104) amended.

<sup>1235</sup> St. Cyprian of Carthage, *Letters* 55.10 (ANF 5:350) amended.

<sup>1236</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 92: pp. 426–427.

*Because great will be the day of Jezreel, that is to say, great indeed is the day of Christ, when he will raise all the dead, coming down from heaven and sitting as Scripture says on the throne of his glory, and he will render to everyone according to each one's works (Matt. 25:31; 16:27) ... David also reveals the time of the coming of our Savior in saying, 'This is the day the Lord has made; let us be glad and rejoice in it' (Ps. 118:24)."*<sup>1237</sup>

### **1381. What is Satan's attitude towards the second coming of Christ?**

Satan is aware that he is incapable of opposing the Lord Christ in His second coming; so he makes every effort to deceive people and lead them astray, convincing them that a false christ or his followers are in fact the Christ who is to come. Thus we read: "Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour" (1 John 2:18). And, "Then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'There!' do not believe it" (Matt. 24:23).

The apostle John says, "It is the last hour." In every generation, the faithful have felt that it is the last hour; and so, they prepare themselves for His coming and are cautious of Satan's deception. Every day, the believer tells himself that these may well be the last moments of the battle between God and the devil. God supports His children and grants them victory; and the devil also fights, pouring his spirit into antichrists in an effort to spoil the faith and life of God's children. God's children love their heavenly Father and consider the days of their earthly sojourn, however long, as 'the last hour,' which must come to an end that they may then live in Paradise until they are crowned for eternity. In this way the apostle reassures his children not to fear those who oppose them.

### **1382. What is the faithful's attitude towards the devil who opposes the Lord Christ and tries to pervert His second coming?**

When apostle John tells us about Satan and his opposition to the Lord Christ, even at His second coming, he calls the faithful to be steadfast in their faith in God and to cherish being His children: "Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father. And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life. These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming." (1 John 2:24–29). The purpose of his words is to train the eyes of the faithful so that those with new and foreign

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<sup>1237</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Twelve Prophets, Vol. 1* Commentary on Hosea 1.42–43 (FOTC 115:62–63).

teachings cannot mislead us with their deceitful methods, and to make us steadfast through his words as an unyielding anointing within us ...

- a. That we will long and hope for His coming as a bride longs for her bridegroom, longing to abide in his embrace, and to see him face to face for all eternity.
- b. That as the faithful who have not strayed from the Church, we will abide in that which we have heard from the beginning and transmitted from generation to generation. And, remaining firm in the true faith and life, we shall be steadfast in the Son and the Father, looking for the promise for which we yearn; that is, eternal life.
- c. That as is fitting for the faithful who have the steadfast anointing of the Holy, and have no need of foreign teachings, we should abide in that which we received from the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth in whom is no deceit, “and is true, and is not a lie” [1 John 2:27]; whereby all teachers disappear and do not serve of their own accord, but of the Only Teacher, who is the Lord (cf. Matt. 23:10).

**1383. How does the antichrist pave the way for humanity to accept him? And what are the signs of his coming?**

Who is the antichrist? He is the adversary of Christ who strives to wipe out Christianity, but he will come to a terrible end: “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming” (2 Thess. 2:8). The work of the enemy of good is to propagate the spirit of hatred between brethren to pave the way for the coming of the antichrist; for the devil creates division amongst people until they are ready to accept what has been foreordained.

Upon this matter, the apostle Paul clearly indicates the coming of the antichrist: “for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved” (2 Thess. 2:3–10).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “Look therefore to yourself, O man, and make safe your soul. The Church now charges you before the Living God; she declares to you the things concerning Antichrist before they arrive. Whether they will happen in your time we know

not, or whether they will happen after you we know not; but it is well that, knowing these things, you should make yourself secure beforehand.”<sup>1238</sup>

### **1384. What signs will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ?**

No one knows the exact time of the second coming of the Lord Christ. And yet, His coming will be preceded by certain events that the Lord foretold a short time before his passion. These are:

**First:** According to the teachings of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the Son of God, “And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be famines, pestilences, and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another” (Matt. 24:6–10).

**Second:** The Gospel will be preached throughout the whole world (Matt. 24:14).

**Third:** The fullness of the Gentiles will come in and all Israel will be saved (Rom. 11:25–26). They will believe the Gospel and know that Jesus is the true Christ, the Savior. They will understand that the coming of Elijah to prepare the way for the Messiah has already been fulfilled in John the Baptist who came in the spirit of Elijah (Luke 1:17).

**Fourth:** The Great Falling Away will happen before the second coming of Christ and false prophets will deceive many (Matt. 24:5). “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. But he who endures to the end shall be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” (Matt. 24:12–14). Also, many will be preoccupied with worldly lusts (Luke 17:26–30). They will blaspheme the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores and will not repent of their deeds (Rev. 16:11).

Thus, the abundance of sin will create great misery accompanied by anxiety and despair. The Lord described this saying, “And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring; men’s hearts failing them from fear and the expectation of those things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to happen, look up and lift up your heads, because your redemption draws near” (Luke 21:25–28).

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<sup>1238</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.9 (NPNF II/7:107).

Thus shall the prophecy of the apostle Paul be fulfilled: “for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:3–4).

**Fifth:** At the peak of the falling away, the antichrist will spread despair and confusion. We read in the **Didache**: “In the last days of the world false prophets and deceivers will abound, sheep will be perverted and turn into wolves [Matt. 7:15], and love will change to hate, for with the growth of lawlessness men will begin to hate their fellows and persecute them and betray them [Matt. 24:8–10]. then the Deceiver of the World will show himself, pretending to be a Son of God [2 Thess. 2:4] and doing signs and wonders [Matt. 24:24], and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning. After that, all humankind will come up for their fiery trial; multitudes of them will stumble and perish, but such as remain steadfast in the faith will be saved by the Curse (cf. Gal. 3:13).”<sup>1239</sup> St. John the Evangelist says, “every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God” (1 John 4:3) and, “many false prophets have gone out into the world” (1 John 4:1).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “At first indeed he will put on a show of mildness (as though he were a learned and discreet person), and of soberness and benevolence: and by the lying signs and wonders of his magical deceit having beguiled the Jews, as though he were the expected Christ, he shall afterwards be characterized by all kinds of crimes of inhumanity and lawlessness, so as to outdo all unrighteous and ungodly men who have gone before him; displaying against all men, but especially against us Christians, a spirit murderous and most cruel, merciless and crafty. And after perpetrating such things for three years and six months only, he shall be destroyed by the glorious second advent from heaven of the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus, the true Christ, who shall slay Antichrist *with the breath of His mouth* (2 Thess. 2:8), and shall deliver him over to the fire of hell.”<sup>1240</sup>

### 1385. Will the rapture of the faithful occur before the coming of the antichrist?

Some rely on the words of the apostle Paul: “For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16–17). Therefore, it is worth exploring the origin of the word translated as “caught up” in 1 Thess. 4:17 and how it evolved.

<sup>1239</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 16: p. 197–198.

<sup>1240</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 15.12 (NPNF II/7:107–108).

**1386. What is the origin of the term “caught up” in 1 Thess. 4:17 and how did it evolve?**

The term “caught up” or “rapture” derives from a French word that in turn derives from a Latin origin from the Middle Ages meaning the abrupt seizure of a person or possessions. The Latin term here is *raptus* which means violently seized. In the Koine Greek of 1 Thess. 4:17, the verb ἀρπάζω (*harpazō*) suggests being lifted up with the connotation that this occurs with great speed. The same word also occurs in Acts 8:39, 2 Cor. 12:2–4, and Rev. 12:5 where it is translated as “caught away” or “caught up.” In the Latin Vulgate translation of 1 Thess. 4:17, it is translated as *rapiemur* a cognate of *rapio*: to seize and carry off, hurry away.<sup>1241</sup>

**1387. What does the idea of the rapture mean according to John Derby, who adopted it in the early nineteenth century?**

To understand this idea promulgated by **John Derby**, we need to ask the following questions:

- a. Why do none of the Church’s writings of the Fathers or her liturgies mention it as a dogma of the Church before the end of the eighteenth century?
- b. Why does the apostle Paul use this term in his account of the resurrection from the dead in the first letter to the Thessalonians (4:17) but not in his first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 15?
- c. Why is this term not found in the Old or New Testament prophecies concerning the second coming of Christ?
- d. Why do some Evangelical denominations reject it?
- e. Does his doctrine of the rapture agree with the divine *economy* that knows no confusion but rather takes great care that all things are done properly and in good order?
- f. Will the faithful be caught up to the clouds before the Great Tribulation and escape it when we know that the apostles considering tribulations a gift wherein we suffer and are crucified with Christ so we may also rise with Him?
- g. Does the Holy Bible speak of a coming of the Word of God for our salvation, then a second coming to take up His Church to sequester it from the Great Tribulation, and then yet a third coming for the final judgment?

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<sup>1241</sup> Translators’ Note: Perseus Latin Dictionary, online at:  
<https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/resolveform?type=begin&lookup=&lang=la> .



We will return to answer these questions and show that the apostle Paul did not by any means intend the words of 1 Thess. 4:17 to be understood the way John Derby interpreted them.

### 1388. What does it mean to be “caught up”?

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “But in saying ‘we,’ he [i.e., St. Paul] does not speak of himself, for he was not about to remain until the Resurrection, but he speaks of the faithful.”<sup>1242</sup> The term ‘we’ is a sign of the unity of the Church — the apostle Paul considers whatever will happen to those of her children who shall be alive at that time to happen to him also.

**St. John Chrysostom** wonders, “If He is about to descend, on what account shall we be caught up? For the sake of honor. For when a king drives into a city, those who are in honor go out to meet him; but the condemned await the judge within. And upon the coming of an affectionate father, his children indeed, and those who are worthy to be his children, are taken out in a chariot, that they may see and kiss him; but those of the domestics who have offended remain within. We are carried upon the chariot of our Father. For He received Him up in the clouds, and ‘we shall be caught up in the clouds’ (Acts 1:9) Do you see how great is the honor? And as He descends, we go forth to meet Him, and, what is more blessed than all, so we shall be with Him.”<sup>1243</sup>

In **St. Gregory of Nyssa’s** view, the faithful being caught up to the clouds to meet the Lord coming to them and to be with Him forever is a sign the transformation that will befall our bodies. The corruption that was like a heaviness dragging us down to the earth will be transformed into incorruption, and the body will be lifted up lightly to the clouds to meet the Lord: “But only when the trumpet of the resurrection sounds, which awakens the dead, and transforms those who are left in life, after the likeness of those who have undergone the resurrection change, at once to incorruptibility; so that the weight of the flesh is no longer heavy, nor does its burden hold them down to earth, but they rise aloft through the air.”<sup>1244</sup>

### 1389. Do we know when His second coming will happen?

The second coming of our Lord Jesus is a certainty; but of the time of His coming, we remain ignorant. His disciples often asked Him when it would happen, but He answered them: “It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7).

<sup>1242</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* 7 (NPNF I/13:353).

<sup>1243</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians* 8 (NPNF I/13:356).

<sup>1244</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Making of Man* 22.6 (NPNF II/5:411).

As the perfect human being, the Lord Christ Himself did not know: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven,<sup>1245</sup> but My Father only” (Matt. 24:36). Some believe that as the Judge of all humanity, the Son does know the day; but like a teacher setting an exam, He chooses not to disclose the answers to his students.

St. Paul expresses the reality of the second coming, saying, “For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2). St. Peter uses the same analogy: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10). Our Lord Himself compared His second coming to the days of Noah, saying, “But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be” (Matt. 24:37–39). According to the words of our Lord and the disciples, then, we should not seek to know the time of His second coming, but rather be vigilant and prepare ourselves to meet the Lord.

**1390. What will be the state of the soul after it departs from the body and until the day of the Lord’s final coming?**

Living faith, working through love, gives the believer a token of heaven. So, the believer lives in the spirit of hope, longing to meet the Lord Christ face to face. This does not exempt him from the death of the body when the soul departs from it and goes on to enjoy the extension of her life in Christ.

Some ask: Will the soul be judged immediately, or will she wait until the day of judgment? Some believe that the soul that enjoys God’s grace on earth will be subject to a partial judgment and then enjoy paradise with the saints and behold the Lord and His angels until the day of the coming of the Lord, at which time her glory will be perfected. Similarly, the wicked soul that denies the Lord will fall into bitterness be deprived of the vision of the Lord in His glory; and she shall not have a share in the praise of the heavenly beings, until the day of the Lord when she will be cast out into hell with the devil and his angels.<sup>1246</sup>

Some distinguish between paradise and eternal life, believing that paradise is the period between the death of the body and the day of the final judgment. It is only in the subsequent eternal life that we will experience the fullness of our eternal inheritance. Similarly, they distinguish between Hades and hell: Hades being the interim period, bitter because they are deprived of the Lord and His angels; which is followed by the fires of hell and eternal

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<sup>1245</sup> Translators’ Note: Some ancient manuscripts add “nor the Son.”

<sup>1246</sup> H. E. Panteleimon Lampadarios, *The Catechism of the Orthodox Church: Questions and Answers* (Greece, 2006): p. 319.

suffering. The Lord spoke of this in the Sermon on the Mount: of the eternal life prepared for the faithful; and of hell, prepared for the devil and his angels.

**1391. What does the Holy Bible say about the Day of Judgment?**

“... for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28–29).

**1392. What does the Holy Bible say about the eternal kingdom of God?**

“He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end” (Luke 1:32–33).

**1393. Is the Lord coming soon?**

The evangelist says, “it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18), for however long this period lasts, it counts only as a “last hour” in comparison to eternity. He wants us always to be ready for His coming. St. Peter also says, “The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night” (2 Pet. 3:9–10). And further, “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming” (Matt. 25:13).

**1394. How is it possible for the body that has decomposed to return and be reunited with the soul?**

If God created the body from dust, He is quite capable re-creating it after it has decomposed. St. Paul uses the analogy of the grain, which is planted in the earth, decomposes, and then flourishes into a tree: “what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain—perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body” (1 Cor. 15:36–38).

**1395. Will every human being rise?**

All human beings who have died will be resurrected without exception, and those who are still alive at that time will have their bodies changed in a moment into spiritual and immortal bodies: “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will

sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:51–52).

**1396. What is the state of the soul in the period between her departure from the body and the day of the resurrection?**

The souls of the righteous who have reposed abide in divine light and in a state of sublime contentment, having a foretaste of eternal joy. The souls of the wicked abide in a state of bitterness.

**1397. Why does the soul not enjoy its final destiny immediately after her departure from the body?**

St. Paul says, “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). He also says, “For we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Cor. 5:10).

**1398. Why do we say that the souls of the righteous taste blessings before the Last Day?**

This is what Jesus Christ Himself testified in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus: “So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom. The rich man also died and was buried” (Luke 16:22).

**1399. Do the righteous meet the Lord Christ face to face immediately after death?**

This is evident from the apostle Paul’s longing to die to be with Christ (Phil. 1:23).

**1400. What is the eternal life that the righteous enjoy?**

The evangelist says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). And the apostle Paul says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a one was caught up to the third heaven ... How he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:2–4).

**1401. What is the source of this supreme joy?**

It is the contemplation of the light of God, and of His glory, and union with Him. The apostle Paul says, “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known” (1 Cor. 13:12). And our Lord Christ says, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).

**1402. Does the body partake of eternal joy together with the soul?**

When the Lord comes, our bodies will enjoy the light of God and become the image of the Lord Christ in His He transfiguration on Mount Tabor. The apostle Paul says, “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power ... And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Cor. 15:43, 49).

**1403. Will all the righteous be equal in glory?**

Each person will receive a degree of glory according to his faith, love, and holy deeds. The apostle Paul says, “There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor 15:41–42). Further, every believer will rejoice over the glory of others, counting it as his own, without envy.

**1404. What is the portion of the defiant who refuse to believe?**

“This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14–15). **St Jacob of Sarug** says:

“There, justice will praise the righteous  
and the evildoers will be blamed for their deeds.

There, images of the glory of the beautiful will be formed  
by the fiery colors of the intangible burning flame.

There, the hateful deeds of the evildoers will be declared  
and all will stand with their deeds without a veil.

There, he who is deserving will be glorified by his deeds,  
for there is no favoritism.

In that court, uprightness prevails  
and all verdicts are fairly made.

The true, final revenge is accomplished,  
for there is no reason that evildoers be sheltered from punishment.”<sup>1247</sup>

**1405. Why does God allow eternal suffering for the wicked?**

God does not will that anyone should perish, but the wicked have refused to cleave to God, He who is the only source of life and eternal joy. They have rejected the truth and the gift of salvation. What befalls them is the fruit of their own choice to isolate themselves from God, the source of their life and their joy.

**1406. What do we gain from contemplating death, resurrection, the Great Day of the Lord, and eternal life or eternal suffering?**

All of these encourage our desire to meet God, to accept the free salvation He offers us, and to enter into friendship with Him. Thus, through divine grace, we can conquer the attractions of this world and its pleasures and resist the temptation of sin and the deceitful trickery of the devil.

**1407. What are we taught about the end of time?**

The apostle Paul says, “For the form of this world is passing away” (1 Cor. 7:31). He wants to emphasize that everything in this present world is but uncertain appearances that will not endure. So we also read, “But the end of all things is at hand” (1 Pet. 4:7), and “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Pet. 3:10).

The Old Testament points frequently anticipates coming of our Lord on the last day, for example: “For behold, the LORD will come with fire, and with His chariots, like a whirlwind, to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire and by His sword, the LORD will judge all flesh. And the slain of the LORD shall be many” (Isa. 66:15–16).

Zephaniah the prophet says, “The great day of the LORD is near; it is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the LORD is bitter; there the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of devastation and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and alarm against the fortified cities and against the high towers. ‘I will bring distress upon men, and they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD; their blood shall be poured out like dust, and their flesh like refuse.’ Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the LORD’s wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by

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<sup>1247</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 68 On the End and the Fearful Judgment.

the fire of His jealousy, for He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land” (Zeph. 1:14–18).

Malachi the prophet says, ““For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘That will leave them neither root nor branch”” (Mal. 4:1).

And Daniel the prophet saw in a dream: “I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him. A thousand thousands ministered to Him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. I watched then because of the sound of the pompous words which the horn was speaking; I watched till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and a time. I was watching in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed” (Dan. 7:9–14).

However, some interpret these Old Testament verses as referring to the first coming of the Lord Christ in which He was incarnate and became condemnation to those who did not believe in Him.<sup>1248</sup> We read in the Gospel of John: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18).

#### **1408. What are we taught about the end of time according to holy Tradition?**

In the **Didache** we read:

“Be watchful over your life; never let your lamps go out or your loins be ungirt, but keep yourselves always in readiness, for you can never be sure of the hour when our Lord may be coming [Luke 12:35; Matt. 24:42].

“Come often together for spiritual improvement; because all the past years of your faith will be no good to you at the end, unless you have made yourselves perfect.

<sup>1248</sup> H. E. Panteleimon Lampadarios, *The Catechism of the Orthodox Church: Questions and Answers* (Greece, 2006): p. 337.

“In the last days of the world false prophets and deceivers will abound, sheep will be perverted and turn into wolves, and love will change to hate [Matt. 24:12] ...

“... for with the growth of lawlessness men will begin to hate their fellows [Matt. 24:8–10] and persecute them and betray them. Then the Deceiver of the World will show himself [Rev. 12:9], pretending to be a Son of God [2 Thess. 2:4] and doing signs and wonders [Matt. 24:24], and the earth will be delivered into his hands, and he will work such wickedness as there has never been since the beginning.

“After that, all humankind will come up for their fiery trial; multitudes of them will stumble and perish, but such as remain steadfast in the faith will be saved by the Curse (cf. Gal. 3:13) [Matt. 24:8–13].

“And then the signs of the truth will appear: first the sign of the opening heavens, next the sign of the trumpet’s voice [Matt. 24:31], and thirdly the rising of the dead – not of all the dead [1 Thess. 4:16–17] ...

“... but, as it says, *the Lord will come, and with him all his holy ones* [Zech. 14:5]. And then the whole world will see the Lord as He comes riding on the clouds of heaven [Matt. 24:30] ...”<sup>1249</sup>

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<sup>1249</sup> “The Didache” in *Early Christian Writings*, trans., Maxwell Staniforth and Andrew Louth (Penguin, 1987) 16: p. 197–198.





## 5

# The Final Judgment

### 1409. What does the New Testament say about the Final Judgment?

**First: The wicked will receive retribution and the faithful will be honored.** In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord says, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt. 7:22–23). And elsewhere: “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36); “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works” (Matt. 16:27); and “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me’ ...” (Matt. 25:32–36).

**Second: Heaven and earth shall flee away.** St. John the Beloved says, “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them” (Rev. 20:11). Here, our Lord appears sitting on a white throne as a sign of peace, for He will no longer fight or defend, because the Church is now secure and Satan her enemy is bound and soon to be cast into the fire. The material earth and heaven have fled away from before the Lord. For this reason, the Lord no longer appears with a sword in his mouth (Rev. 1:16, 19:15, 21); nor as a horseman emerging from the tribe of Judah ready for war (Zech. 1:8); nor as a lion to comfort despondent souls (Rev. 5:5) — but enthroned and offering the triumphant a portion in the glories of heaven. He describes Him saying, “from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them,” to reassure us that we have no need of the earth or anything in it: neither oceans nor material resources; nor planets, nor stars. Thus does He drive away from before us all our old memories of a life that was filled with trials and toil, and with battles between us and the devil. The eternal glories shall swallow up our old impressions and expel them from our memory.

**Third: Each person shall be judged according to his deeds.** “And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and

Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Rev. 20:12–13). In an instant, all the righteous are judged according to their deeds, the young with the old, whose names are written in the Book of Life. And the wicked are judged according to their deeds, those who inhabited Hades and were dead spiritually, for with the Lord there is no partiality. And here, we note the following:

- a. **The books will be opened: St. Augustine** considers this to be a symbol of the unlocking of the secrets of all humanity, all that is in their hearts and consciences, so that all may know that the Lord is just.<sup>1250</sup>
- b. **The Book of Life will be opened:** That is, the person of our Lord Jesus and His role as the Tree of Life will be disclosed: whoever eats from it during the time of his striving on earth will live forever. He is the open book in which the faithful can read their righteousness that is found in the person of Christ. Then, they shall rejoice saying, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom. 8:1–2).
- c. **The sea will give up the dead who were in it: St. Augustine** considers this to be a symbol of the wicked upon whom the day of the Lord has come, but who have not yet died or gone to Hades. Here, the sea with its pleasures in which they have drowned is their evil lives that shall deliver them up to eternal judgment.<sup>1251</sup>

**Fourth: Hades shall deliver up the dead who are in it.** These too were justly judged according to their evil deeds. Thus we read: “and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:13–15). This is the end of those who live according to the flesh, and whose souls are dead. Their portion after the death of the body is Hades, from whence the second death will befall them, which is the eternal fire. For **St. Augustine**, this refers to the devil, the ruler of those whose souls are dead and leader of the inhabitants of hell, for he is thrown into the lake of fire. By this, the very image of evil is entirely eliminated, such that the apostle John paints a joyous picture of our heavenly bridal-home in the two chapters that follow, a home of complete safety and tranquility; for the evil one has been cast far away forever.<sup>1252</sup>

<sup>1250</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.14 (NPNF I/2:434).

<sup>1251</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.15 (NPNF I/2:434–435).

<sup>1252</sup> See St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.15 (NPNF I/2:435).

#### **1410. What does the Old Testament say about the Final Judgment?**

In the Old Testament we find the following words about the Final Judgment:

“‘I will utterly consume everything from the face of the land,’ says the LORD; ‘I will consume man and beast; I will consume the birds of the heavens, the fish of the sea, and the stumbling blocks along with the wicked. I will cut off man from the face of the land,’ says the LORD” (Zeph. 1:2–3).

“‘It shall be in that day,’ says the LORD of hosts, ‘that I will cut off the names of the idols from the land, and they shall no longer be remembered. I will also cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to depart from the land’” (Zech. 13:2).

“‘I watched till thrones were put in place, and the Ancient of Days was seated; His garment was white as snow, and the hair of His head was like pure wool. His throne was a fiery flame, its wheels a burning fire; a fiery stream issued. The court was seated, and the books were opened ...’” (Dan. 7:9–10).

“‘Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. Therefore, all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; they will be in pain as a woman in childbirth; they will be amazed at one another; their faces will be like flames. Behold, the day of the Lord comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine. I will punish the world for its evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; I will halt the arrogance of the proud, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible ... Therefore, I will shake the heavens, and the earth will move out of her place, in the wrath of the Lord of hosts and in the day of His fierce anger” (Isa. 13:6–13).

#### **1411. What blessings shall the faithful who are righteous enjoy?**

The Lord Christ opens His Sermon on the Mount with nine beatitudes (Matt. 5:2–11) and continues by encouragingly telling the faithful that they are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13–14) and highlighting the heavenly fatherhood of God (Matt. 7:11). When He speaks of kingdom, He says that it is “‘prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:34); and when He speaks of the everlasting fire, He says that it is “‘prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matt. 25:41).

Thus does the Lord of Glory deal with His faithful people; He emphasizes to us that which is positive and joyful and reassures us that He has cared for us since the foundation of the world. But the punishments are prepared for the devil and his angels. The apostle Paul adopts the same approach, for in his epistles, he begins by highlighting what is good about his readers, and only then does he go on to address the faults. As such, they experience his

appreciation of them, and his love and encouragement; for indeed, the Holy Spirit urges everyone to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins.

Most important among the blessings the faithful who are righteous receive are these:

**First: The nine beatitudes with which the Lord opens His Sermon.** The word “blessed” in Greek has no exact translation in other languages. It does not mean only “happy” or “joyful,” but suggests the blessed heavenly and angelic life. This blessing — eagerly anticipated by the righteous — is what fills them with heavenly, eternal, and indescribable joy. The word of God invites us to taste the promise of this blessing throughout our striving on earth and bestows divine grace upon us.

**Abba Chæremon** says, “It is indeed a sign of the utmost blessedness and of singular goodness both continually to learn and to teach that love by which we cling to the Lord, so that meditation on Him may, as the Psalmist says, occupy all the days and nights of our life (cf. Ps. 1:2), and may support our soul, which insatiably hungers and thirsts after righteousness, by continually chewing the cud of this heavenly food.”<sup>1253</sup>

**Mo’allim Daniel El-Salihi** sees the beatitudes as gifts of the Holy Spirit granted to whosoever desires them. The term “blessed” is one of the titles of our Lord Christ, as St. Paul says: “He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). Thus, the beatitudes are the work of the Spirit in us through our union with the Beatific and Blessed One — our Head, Jesus Christ. Some observe that the psalmist beatifies those who resist evil (Ps. 1) to reassure us that these blessings are granted as a free gift to whomsoever resists evil.

Therefore, **St. Augustine** explains that to the young person who resists evil thoughts, God will grant a greater crown than that granted to a small child who has never been attacked by evil feelings. The former receives the crown of striving and battling out of love, and experiences the purity of maturity; unlike a small child whose purity is due to impotence.

**Second: The paradise of God with the Tree of Life in its midst (Rev. 2:7).** This is the tree of which Adam and Eve were deprived as a consequence of their disobedience to the divine commandment. The Word of God was incarnate so that through His crucifixion we might enter the heavenly paradise that is named the holy city of God, descending from heaven from God and prepared as a bride adorned for her husband (Rev. 21:2). It is the tabernacle of God, bearing His glory, where the righteous dwell with God (Rev. 21:11). It contains no temple, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple (Rev. 21:22). It is the general assembly and the Church of the firstborn who are renewed in heaven (Heb. 12:23). It is an incorruptible inheritance that does not fade away but is reserved in the heavens (1 Pet. 1:4).

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** says:

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<sup>1253</sup> St. John Cassian, *The Conferences* 11.15 (NPNF II/11:422).

“The tree of life [the source of immortality] is the symbol of the Son of the Living One.”<sup>1254</sup>

“The assembly of saints bears resemblance to Paradise: in it each day is plucked the fruit of Him who gives life to all.”<sup>1255</sup>

“Blessed be the Merciful One, who saw the weapon by Paradise, that closed the way to the Tree of Life; and came and took a Body which could suffer, that with the Door, that was in His side, He might open the way into Paradise.”<sup>1256</sup>

“Perhaps that blessed tree, the Tree of Life, is, by its rays, the sun of Paradise; its leaves glisten, and on them are impressed the spiritual graces of that Garden. In the breezes the other trees bow down as if in worship before that sovereign and leader of the trees.”<sup>1257</sup>

**Third: The indescribable radiance of the righteous.** And the sublime beauty that amazes the inhabitants of heaven. The righteous will partake of that divine nature which they experienced during their earthly striving — albeit in a limited fashion — through the working of divine grace in them; and without the loss of their individual personality or human nature. Just as the Word of God united with human nature yet remained divine, so can we partake of the divine nature and yet remain human. We are not called to external virtues, but union with God and to becoming His image, so that the Lord’s love, holiness, patience, endurance, longsuffering, meekness, and simplicity may be ours. Thus, the apostle Peter says, “that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet. 1:4).

**Fourth: The faithful become kings and queens sitting at the right hand of the King of kings.** The righteous reign eternally and they will no longer suffer from fear nor hunger, nor wrestle with the forces of darkness and with sin. Instead, concord, harmony, and unity will prevail between the soul and the body, as well as between all the righteous inheritors of eternal glory, and between them and the ranks of heaven.

**Fifth: The righteous enjoy a sublime unity.** The Lord Christ beseeched the Father before His crucifixion saying, “I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will

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<sup>1254</sup> St. Isaac the Syrian, *Hymns on the Church* 49.16, quoted in PP 10:61.

<sup>1255</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* 6.8 (PP 10:111).

<sup>1256</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Nativity* 6.4 (NPNF II/13:238).

<sup>1257</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Paradise* 3.2 (PP 10:91).

believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us” (John 17:20–21).

**Sixth: They see God as He is.** St. John the Beloved says, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2).

Seeing Him will instill in us great joy, as it did for the disciples at the Transfiguration when Peter said, “Rabbi, it is good for us to be here” (Mark 9:5). The apostle Paul says, “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). And the Lord says, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). Unending is the thirst of the true believer to see God by all means, to meet his heavenly Beloved face-to-face. This vision does not belong only to the life to come — it is the extension of the lived daily experience of the believer.

The apostle Paul states: “who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see” (1Tim. 6:16). This raises many questions, such as:

- a. Is this vision vouchsafed only for eternal life? Or can it begin here, experienced in the depths of the soul?
- b. When the angelic inhabitants of heaven behold God, do they see his essence?
- c. Do the faithful in heaven enjoy the vision of the essence of God?

Only the true Word and the only begotten Son can see the Father, for He is one with Him in that essence. No being, whether of earth or heaven, is like Him. There is no possibility of comparison between Him and Abraham, the father of the patriarchs, or Moses who received the Law, or any other prophet; or even between Him and any of the ranks of heaven.

**St. Theophilus of Antioch** says, “Hear, O man. The appearance of God is ineffable and indescribable, and cannot be seen by eyes of flesh. For in glory He is incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable. For if I say He is Light, I name but His own work; if I call Him Word, I name but His sovereignty; if I call Him Mind, I speak but of His wisdom; if I say He is Spirit, I speak of His breath; ... if Providence, I but mention His goodness; if I call Him Kingdom, I but mention His glory; if I call Him Lord, I mention His being judge; if I call Him Judge, I speak of Him as being just; if I call Him Father, I speak of all things as being from Him; if I call Him Fire, I but mention His anger.”<sup>1258</sup>

“When you shall have put off the mortal, and put on incorruption, then shall you see God worthily. For God will raise your flesh immortal with your soul; and then, having become

<sup>1258</sup> St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 1.3 (ANF 2:89–90).

immortal, you shall see the Immortal, if now you believe on Him; and then you shall know that you have spoken unjustly against Him.”<sup>1259</sup>

We will revel in the vision of the Holy Trinity and grow in knowledge of divine mysteries, in **St. Irenaeus’** view, “not only in the present world, but also in that which is to come, so that God should for ever teach, and man should for ever learn the things taught him by God.”<sup>1260</sup> The vision will differ from one person to another, according to the words of the Lord: “In My Father's house are many mansions” (John 14:2).<sup>1261</sup>

And **St. Clement of Alexandria** says, “Receive Christ, receive sight, receive your light, ‘In order that you may know well both God and man.’<sup>1262</sup> ‘Sweet is the Word that gives us light, precious above gold and gems; it is to be desired above honey and the honey-comb’ (Ps. 19:10).”<sup>1263</sup>

#### **1412. How can we behold God?** <sup>1264</sup>

The pure heart is the inner eye of the spirit that sees what cannot be seen. The word “purity” in Greek refers to washing and purification, as when one removes dirt from clothes. It can also mean purifying what is good by removing from it what is bad; like separating wheat from chaff, or purging an army of cowards. And it can also denote a pure, unadulterated substance, such as milk with no additives. Likewise, the heart that at all times bows at the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ is at all times washed clean by the Holy Blood and purged of every impurity, and guarded from domination by any wicked desire by the Holy Spirit Himself who permeated it through the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation. Thus the heart becomes clear and pure, together with all its desires, feelings, and motives, seeking nothing from anything but God alone; and sees Him by faith through the Holy Spirit dwelling in it.

**St. Augustine** says:

“Let us be purifying our hearts by faith, that we may be prepared for that ineffable and, so to speak, invisible vision.”<sup>1265</sup>

“Let him strive by continence to purify that which he may lift up to God.”<sup>1266</sup>

“This is the end of our love; an end whereby we are perfected, and not consumed ... when we come to the vision of God, we shall require no more. For what need he seek for, with

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<sup>1259</sup> St. Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolycus* 1.7 (ANF 2:91) amended.

<sup>1260</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 2.28.3 (ANF 1:399).

<sup>1261</sup> See St. Irenaeus of Lyon, *Against Heresies* 5.36.2 (ANF 1:567).

<sup>1262</sup> Homer, *Iliad* v. 128.

<sup>1263</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen* 11 (ANF 2:203) amended.

<sup>1264</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Book of Matthew: A Patristic Commentary* (undated): Chapter 5.

<sup>1265</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 53.12 (NPNF I/7:295).

<sup>1266</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* 1.7 (NPNF I/7:9).



whom God is present? ... How often already has he enumerated the blessed, and the causes of their blessedness, and their works and recompenses, their merits and rewards! But nowhere [else] has it been said, 'They shall see God' ... When we come to the 'pure in heart,' there is the vision of God promised. And not without good cause; for there, in the heart, are the eyes, by which God is seen. Speaking of these eyes, the Apostle Paul says, 'The eyes of your heart being enlightened' (Eph. 1:8). At present then these eyes are enlightened, as is suitable to their infirmity, by faith; hereafter as shall be suited to their strength, they shall be enlightened by sight. 'For as long as we are in the body we are absent from the Lord; for we walk by faith, not by sight' (2 Cor. 5:6–7). Now as long as we are in this state of faith, what is said of us? 'We see now through a glass darkly; but then face to face' (1 Cor. 13:12)."<sup>1267</sup>

The scholar **Origen** says, "Whoever has a pure heart will see God (cf. Matt. 5:8). Whoever does not, will not see what the other beholds. I think we should understand something similar of Christ, too, when he was seen in the body. Not everyone who laid eyes on him was able to see him. They saw his body, but, insofar as he was Christ, they could not see him. But his disciples saw him and beheld the greatness of his divinity."<sup>1268</sup>

**St. Clement of Alexandria** says, "For what rational cause remains any more to the man who has gained 'the light inaccessible' (1 Tim. 6:16) for reverting to the good things of the world?"<sup>1269</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, "Now He here calls 'pure,' either those who have attained unto all virtue, and are not conscious to themselves of any evil; or those who live in temperance. For there is nothing which we need so much in order to see God, as this last virtue. Therefore Paul also said, 'Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord' (Heb. 12:14)."<sup>1270</sup>

### **1413. On the Day of Judgment, what tribulations shall befall the wicked who refuse to return to God?**

**First: They are deprived of divine grace.** They receive retribution according to their stubborn hearts, and so they will not see God in his glory.

**Second: Their heart is afflicted with the worm that does not die,** which means that sorrow and bitterness over their deeds will not depart from them.

**Third: They have fellowship with the devil and dark forces** in the lake of fire that never goes out.

**Fourth: We hear of Hades and the torment** (Luke 16:23) that no one can comprehend.

<sup>1267</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 3.6 (NPNF I/6:267) amended.

<sup>1268</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies in Luke* 3.3–4 (FOTC 94:15).

<sup>1269</sup> St. Clement of Alexandria, *The Stromata, or Miscellanies* 6.9 (ANF 2:497).

<sup>1270</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 15.6 (NPNF I/10:91) amended.

**1414. What do the Church Fathers say about the troubles on the Day of Judgment that will befall the wicked who refuse to return to God?**

**St. Augustine** says:

“The Judge here shall be the Son of Man; here shall That Form judge which was judged. Hear and understand: the Prophet had said this already, ‘They shall look on Him whom they pierced’ (Zech. 12:10; John 19:37). That Very Form shall they see which they smote with a spear. He shall sit as Judge, Who stood at the judge’s seat. He shall condemn the real criminals, Who was made a criminal falsely. He shall come Himself, That Form shall come ... For they who were to be judged were both good and bad. ‘But blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matt. 5:8). It remained that in the Judgment the Form of the servant should be manifested both to good and bad, the Form of God be reserved for the good alone.”<sup>1271</sup>

“When is He to manifest Himself to them that love Him? After the resurrection of the body, when ‘the ungodly shall be taken away that he see not the Glory of God.’ For then ‘when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is’ (1 John 3:2). This is life eternal.”<sup>1272</sup>

“... and that it is not permitted to the wicked to see God — for ‘blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God’ (Matt. 5:8).”<sup>1273</sup>

“Then there will be an open separation; a distinguishing of life just as of the character, a separation as there is in wisdom, so also will there be in bodies. They that have done well will go to live with the angels of God; they that have done evil, to be tormented with the devil and his angels ... Then He will manifest Himself, as He has promised to manifest Himself to them that love Him. For ‘he that loves me,’ says He, ‘keeps my commandments; and he that loves me shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him’ (John 14:21).”<sup>1274</sup>

And **St. Cyril of Alexandria** says, “and Him Whom these wretched beings ridiculed, as they saw Him hang on the precious cross, they shall behold crowned with godlike glory, and in just retribution of their wickedness towards Him, shall fall into the pit of destruction.”<sup>1275</sup>

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<sup>1271</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* Sermon 77.10 (NPNF I/6:489–490).

<sup>1272</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* Sermon 77.13 (NPNF I/6:490).

<sup>1273</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* Tractate 19.16 (NPNF I/7:129).

<sup>1274</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John* Tractate 19.18 (NPNF I/7:130–131) amended.

<sup>1275</sup> St. Cyril of Alexandria, *A Commentary upon the Gospel According to St. Luke: Part II*, trans. R. Payne Smith (Oxford University Press, 1859) 145: p. 681.

### 1415. How can we prepare for the Day of Judgment?

**First: We should live in expectation of His coming. St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “He comes in the blessed glory of His Father to judge the living and the dead. He became for us a way of life full of light and glory, that we might walk in the light to the Father.”<sup>1276</sup>

**Second: We should enfold ourselves in divine fear and divine love. St. Basil the Great** uses the expectation of God’s coming as a motivation for spiritual reformation, and the fear of God’s judgment as a strong motivation to practice virtue, whether for the novice or the negligent. Here as some of his words: “may we be able in the future age of immortality to escape the wrath to come upon the sons of contumacy.”<sup>1277</sup>

“Let us diligently listen when it [i.e., the second coming] is spoken of, and ask with zeal to practice the divine commandments, because we do not know what day or what hour our Lord will come.”

“Shall we not set before our eyes this great and terrifying day of the Lord?”

**St. Isaac the Syrian** says, “When you approach your bed, because the time for sleep has come, say: O bed, perhaps you will become my grave this night and I not know it. Perhaps instead of temporary sleep, eternal sleep will fall on me this night, while I thought of preparing for days and months, which I did not see. As long as you have feet, run after the service of righteousness, before they be caught by a bond which it is impossible to sever. As long as you have hands, stretch them towards heaven in prayer, before your arms fall from their joints and you desire to raise them, and it is impossible for you. As long as you have fingers, raise them unto God in supplication. For there will come a time when the splendid strength of their joints is weakened. As long as you have eyes, fill them with tears during prayer, weeping for your sins, before the moment when sand will cover the black [clothes] and the eyes will become feeble, staring senseless in one direction, without your knowing it. As long as the heart, the fountain of the deliberations, is ordered by a distinguishing power, bethink of those things which are helpful to your life, before the soul be hastened on to departure from it (the heart) and become a house devoid of its inhabitants.”<sup>1278</sup>

**Evagrius of Pontus** says, “Remember always your departure from life and forget not the eternal judgement, and there will be no fault in your soul.”<sup>1279</sup> Among the Sayings of the Desert Fathers, we read: “A diligent brother executing his liturgy with his own brother would be so overcome with tears that he would miss a verse of the psalm. One day the other brother

<sup>1276</sup> Handwritten manuscript of the *Memre* of St. Ephrem the Syrian in the Dayr al-Surian [Monastery of the Syrians] collection — Memra No. 2000 dated 14 Amshir 1207 A. M. transcribed by the monk Samuel al-Suriyani, *Treatise 21*: pp. 130–131.

<sup>1277</sup> St. Basil of Caesarea, *On the Judgment of God* (FOTC 9:54).

<sup>1278</sup> St Isaac The Syrian, *Mystic Treatises by Isaac of Nineveh*. Trans., A. J. Wensinck. Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1923) 64.459–460: p. 308 amended.

<sup>1279</sup> “To Monks in Monasteries and Communities” in *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, trans., Robert E. Sinkewicz., ed. Gillian Clark and Andrew Louth (Oxford University Press, 2003): p. 125.

asked him to tell him what he was thinking about during the liturgy that he would weep so bitterly. ‘Forgive me brother,’ he said to him, ‘when I am at my liturgy, I see the Judge all the time, with myself standing there as the accused, being examined; and he is saying to me: “Why did you sin?” So then, since I did not know what to say in my defence, my mouth becomes blocked up and, as a result, I lose a verse of the psalm. But forgive me for distressing you and, if you get relief, each of us will perform his liturgy separately.’ The brother said to him: ‘No, father, for even though I do not sorrow myself, I debase myself when I observe you.’ When God observed his humility, he gave him the grace of his brother’s sorrow.”<sup>1280</sup>

And **St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “We are incapable of describing the joys that await those who live according to the will of God; nor are we capable of comparing the hardship of sinners in hell to anything similar that happens on earth.”

**Third: We should welcome our Lord who is coming from heaven with praise. St. Ephrem the Syrian** says, “Come, beloved, let us walk in the way which the Lord has shown us, that with joy we might enter into His kingdom. Let us take provisions and oil in our coffers, for the length of this way is not slight. Let us gird our loins with purity and truth as men and genuine slaves awaiting their Master. Let us hang our lamps and nobly keep vigil. For we are waiting to receive our Lord from the heavens. Let us not slumber, that our lamps might not be extinguished. Come, it is time. The night is spent, and the day draws near. You sons of light approach the Light. Go out with joy to meet our Lord ... Lift your eye to that joy, you heirs of the Father and co-heirs of the Only-begotten Son of God.”<sup>1281</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “Now, therefore, is the season of mercy, afterwards will be the time for judgment: for He says, ‘I will sing to You, O Lord, of mercy and judgment’ (Ps. 101:1).”<sup>1282</sup>

Let us praise the Lord with **St. Jacob of Sarug**, saying:

“Hear O distinguished ones, the great miracle of judgment,  
and give praise to the Judge of hidden things.

It is a marvelous saying and an astonishing hearing  
concerning that day in which all the works of men will be examined.

When the heavens and the earth and the world and the sea dissolve,  
and the judgment of all tribes comes before justice.

When all forms of human beings are revealed and they stand naked:  
either to lose or to be victorious ...

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<sup>1280</sup> John Wortley, *The Anonymous Sayings Of The Desert Fathers*, trans., John Wortley, ed., John Wortley (Cambridge University Press, 2013) N.523: p. 357.

<sup>1281</sup> St. Ephrem the Syrian, *On The Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ 2*.

<sup>1282</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel According to St. John 54.5* (NPNF I/7:297) amended.

When the boastfully arrogant is humbled,  
and the simply humble is elevated.

When pride is cast into the pit,  
and humility rides the clouds to rise.

When the weak are placed on high as it is written,  
and the strong fall into the depths, because they have sinned.

When poverty brings low and humiliates the rich,  
and the king's great treasure is opened to the poor ...

When justice rewards according to its promise,  
for it does not deny (the reward of) the one who pours even a cup of water.

When she moves to demand her own forcefully,  
for she does not neglect commentary even about the blink of an eye ...

When the Judge shows His disciples His power of command,  
and the ranks of powers cry out: Blessed is your judgment.

When the angels and the righteous praise:  
Blessed are Your judgments and a shining light is Your righteousness.

When the widow cries out in pain against her wrongdoer,  
and the orphan rebukes the one who slapped him before the ruler.

When the orphans sigh loudly,  
and the sound of their grief sets fire to their extortioners.

When alms are as triumphant as planets,  
and the ranks of their givers are sublime, beautiful, and glorious.

When the abhorrent shortcomings of the sons of sin are exposed,  
and lying does not cover the one who clung to it.

When all forms are torn apart from all ranks,  
and stand there with necks uncovered, as it is written.

Then, let them who were glorified rejoice,  
and let no one grieve or be blamed.

In that victory, whoever conquers will be counted among the triumphants;  
whereas should he win here, he would not gain anything.”<sup>1283</sup>

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<sup>1283</sup> St. Jacob of Sarug, *Memre* 68 On the End and the Fearful Judgment.



## 6

**The Resurrected Body**<sup>1284</sup>

Our discussion of the resurrected body leads us to speak of the amazing union between the human body and soul.

**1416. What is the dialogue that takes place between the soul and the body at the moment of their separation?**<sup>1285</sup>

**St. Ephrem the Syrian** proffers us a wonderful image of the unity of the soul with the body, and their state at the moment of death when the soul departs from the body. The soul that is sanctified in the Lord feels that she is indebted to the sanctified body; and the sanctified body feels that it is indebted to the sanctified soul. Each was a helper to the other in their striving on earth through the work of divine grace in them. With the eyes we read the word of God; with the hands we offer loving services to others; with the feet we walk towards the house of God; and the person with all his body practices prayer, fasting, worship, and prostration before the Lord. Truly, these are happy moments when the body works in union with the soul, and the person in his entirety becomes like an angel of God in heaven, and the body presents no impediment to the soul's eternal glory.

“The soul having left the body,  
Is in great suffering,  
And feels much grief;  
And she is distracted  
Hither and thither,  
As to her destination;  
For the evil spirits desire  
That she should go with them  
Into the midst of Gehenna;  
And the angels also,  
That she should journey with them  
To the region of light.

“In that moment,  
The soul lightly esteems  
Her beloved friends and brethren,  
Those whom she held dear,

<sup>1284</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *The Book of Corinthians I: A Patristic Commentary* (undated) Chapter 15.

<sup>1285</sup> The quotes in this section are all from St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Selected Metrical Hymns and Homilies of Ephraem Syrus*, trans., Henry Burgess (London: Robert B. Blackader, 1853) 12 The Parting of Body and Soul: pp. 29–30 amended.

And her neighbours,  
And those with whom she was familiar.”

This is how St. Ephrem the Syrian sees the wrestling between the forces of darkness and the angels of God: the former make every effort to attract the soul to themselves, and find their pleasure in dragging it into the fires of evil and darkness. On the other hand, the angels’ happiness and joy is to find a soul that has clung to the Lord, going out to meet the One with whom it lived while it was in the world, and then entering into the place of light or the divine abode. The love of the heavenly ones for us is manifested powerfully when the soul departs from the body, as they carry the soul to the divine presence: just as they carried the soul of the beggar Lazarus (Luke 16:22). As such, the angels praise the Creator who saved humanity from death and corruption and prepared an eternal inheritance for us.

While the holy soul is preoccupied with the angels who come to carry it to God and welcome it, St. Ephrem believes that the soul, as it departs, grieves for its sisters, the souls that cling to earthly matters and disdain the eternal. St. Ephrem says:

“In that hour she despises  
Whatsoever appertains to riches.  
Or worldly possessions  
But respecting her trespasses  
She has great anxiety,  
They being so many.”

The saint imagines a farewell speech of the soul:

“Then the soul standing separate  
Above the body she has left.  
Speaks thus to it,—  
‘Death has dismissed me  
Remain here in peace  
For I am going away.’  
Then the body replies,—  
‘Depart in peace,  
O soul tenderly loved!  
The Lord who has fashioned us.  
He will procure our deliverance  
From Gehennah!’”

#### **1417. How are the body and soul of a righteous person reunited on the Great Day of the Lord?**

A number of questions trouble the minds of some, including: How is the righteous body reunited with its righteous soul? When the two have been united anew, the body feels



indebted to the sanctified soul; for she has submitted to the Holy Spirit of God and sanctified her will, having invested her joy in obedience to the commandment of her beloved God. She has invited the Savior to establish His kingdom within her and walked in truth by the spirit of adoption by the Father. Likewise, the soul realizes its debt to the body which exercised its senses in the spirit of holiness, and strove to study the Holy Bible, fast, pray, and keep vigil in the spirit of praise. There is no room for reproach between them; when the believer stands on the Day of the Lord, he is grateful for His work in his soul, body, and all his faculties.

**St. Augustine** says, “Because so perfect shall then be the harmony between flesh and spirit, the spirit keeping alive the subjugated flesh without the need of any nourishment, that no part of our nature shall be in discord with another; but as we shall be free from enemies without, so we shall not have ourselves for enemies within.”<sup>1286</sup>

**1418. How shall the body and soul of an evil person be reunited, given that he has not given himself a chance to return to God?**

It seems to me that they would blame one another. The soul would feel that the body with its desires has pushed the person as a whole to love the world, to refuse to return to God, and to be apathetic about encountering Him and accepting the divine grace that would have been capable of establishing the kingdom of God within that person. And the body would feel that the soul is responsible for the straying of the will, and for all the hatred towards others and denial of the grace of God the person has practiced. In this manner, the wicked person spends his life in conflict, even in hell. The body cannot stand the soul, and the soul cannot stand the body. They are in unceasing bitterness and under the condemnation of the doomed — yet they never perish.

In short, in Christ Jesus, love and eternal life prevail, even between the soul and the body; but in hell, bitter conflict prevails, even between the soul and the body.

**1419. How are the dead raised? And what body will they have? (1 Cor. 15:35).**

The first of these questions is posed by unbelievers to those who believe in the resurrection of the dead, that is: “by what power, or by what means is it possible to accomplish resurrection?” In their view, this is impossible. The second question is: Assuming that resurrection is possible, will they rise with exactly the same appearance and body members? The first question is the question of an atheist who cannot fathom the power of God to raise the dead; and the second question arises from the curiosity of a skeptic.

Rather than explaining ‘how?’ faith compels us with the ability of the power of God to do this. When the prophet Ezekiel was asked how it is possible for dry bones to come back to life, his answer was, “O Lord God, You know” (Ezek. 37:3). If God made the sun, the

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<sup>1286</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Enchiridion* 91 (NPNF I/3:266).

moon, and the planets with a word, why should it be difficult for Him to resurrect our bodies anew?

**St. Ambrose** says, “But you wonder how what has yielded to putrefaction can again become solid, how scattered particles can come together, those that are consumed be made good: you do not wonder how seeds broken up under the moist pressure of the earth grow green. For certainly they too, rotting under contact with the earth, are broken up, and when the fertilizing moisture of the soil gives life to the dead and hidden seeds, and, by the vital warmth, as it were, breathes out a kind of soul of the green herb. Then little by little nature raises from the ground the tender stalk of the growing ear, and as a careful mother folds it in certain sheaths, lest the sharp ice should hurt it as it grows, and to protect it from too great heat of the sun; and lest after this the rain should break down the fruit itself escaping as it were from its first cradle and just grown up, or lest the wind should scatter it, or small birds destroy it, she usually hedges it around with a fence of bristling awn.”<sup>1287</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “And wherefore did he Paul not at once appeal to the power of God? Because he is discoursing with unbelievers. For when his discourse is addressed to believers, he has not much need of reasons ... But here he also urges reasons.”<sup>1288</sup>

The apostle Paul says, “Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies” (1 Cor. 15:36). Regarding the first of our two questions, the apostle Paul answers that accomplishing resurrection lies easily within the capabilities of the almighty God whose divine power works constantly to accomplish the likeness of resurrection in our daily lives. Just as a grain of wheat disintegrates and appears to have completely perished, yet returns and yields fruits of the same kind, so it is with our body. He means to say: Why foolishly deny the power of God the bestower of resurrection, when every day we experience His life-giving power over dead things? The apostle Paul’s answer appeals to an example from reality that is familiar to everyone. The objection to the possibility of resurrection has no basis in practical reality. The resurrection of Christ who died for us does not expel from us the death of the body that befell us from Adam — but it brings us to Him to enjoy a new, heavenly life emerging from His life-giving death.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “here he solves an objection brought in by the Gentiles ... And he states two difficulties, one touching the manner of the resurrection, the other, the kind of bodies ... ‘Therefore do I [i.e., Paul] call you foolish because of the things daily done by your own self you are ignorant, and being yourself an artificer of a resurrection, you doubt concerning God.’ Wherefore very emphatically he said, ‘what You sow,’ ‘you who are mortal and perishing.’”<sup>1289</sup>

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<sup>1287</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.55 (NPNF II/10:182).

<sup>1288</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.2 (NPNF I/12:249) amended.

<sup>1289</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.1–2 (NPNF I/12:249) amended.

And **St. Ambrose** says, “We ought not to doubt whatever is in agreement with nature and not opposed to it. It is natural for all living things to rise, while it is their destruction that is unnatural.”

#### **1420. Has God given us any real-life examples to assure us of the glorious resurrection of the body?**

The apostle Paul marvels at the examples in real life that the Creator has afforded us, so that we should be assured that the body can indeed rise. For example, a mere grain of wheat that is buried in dirt produces a spike of grain of the same nature, better and greater than itself. In a similar way, we are sown as a body and rise with the same body, but more beautiful and splendid, bearing a new, glorified, spiritual nature, greater than what was sown. Death is not just a means for the body to cross over into death and return to dust, but also a means of the glorification of the body that it may share in the soul’s eternal splendor. The cross does eradicate the death of the body; for by faith, when we die with the Lord Christ, we are being prepared for the glorious resurrection, with better characteristics more suited to eternal life.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For here his discourse no longer regards the resurrection, but the manner of the resurrection ... What is that then which he says, ‘You do not sow the body that shall be?’ i.e. not the ear of corn: for it is the same, and not the same; the same, because the substance is the same; but not the same, because this is more excellent, the substance remaining the same but its beauty becoming greater, and the same body rising up new.”<sup>1290</sup>

“‘Yes,’ says one, ‘but in that case it is the work of nature.’ Of what nature, tell me? For in that case likewise God surely does the whole; not nature, nor the earth, nor the rain. Wherefore also he making these things manifest, leaves out both earth and rain, atmosphere, sun, and hands of husbandmen, and subjoins, ‘God gives it a body as it pleased Him’ [1 Cor. 15:38]. Do not therefore curiously inquire, nor busy yourself with the how and in what manner, when you hear of the power and will of God.”<sup>1291</sup>

**St. Ambrose** says, “You also, then, are sown as are other things, why do you wonder if you shall rise again as shall others? But you believe as to them, because you see, you believe not this, because you see it not: ‘Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed’ (John 20:29). However, before the season comes, those things also are not believed, for every season is not suited for the raising of seeds. Wheat is sown at one time, and comes up at another; at one time the vine is planted, at another the budding twigs begin to shoot, the foliage grows luxuriant, and the grape is formed; at one time the olive is planted, at another

<sup>1290</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.3 (NPNF I/12:250) amended.

<sup>1291</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.3 (NPNF I/12:250–251) amended.

time, as though pregnant and loaded with its offspring of berries, it is bent down by the abundance of its fruit. But before its own period arrives for each, the produce is restricted, and that which bears has not the age of bearing in its own power.”<sup>1292</sup>

**1421. What is God’s will for our bodies when they are raised from the dead?**

The apostle Paul says, “But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body” (1 Cor. 15:38). God bestows the body “as He pleases” and His pleasure is nothing but that the body enjoys the blessed, heavenly life. This is His pleasure: to grant that the same body that shared in the soul’s earthly struggle also shares its glory.

Every seed that is sown produces a body of its own. We have not heard of a seed of wheat that produced barley, nor an apple seed that produced a lemon; rather every seed produces a harvest of its own kind. The apostle Paul says, “All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of animals, another of fish, and another of birds.” (1 Corinthians 15:39).

The body that the Lord raises is a real body, the body of a human being with his own individual character, yet glorified and spiritual. It is not, as some imagine, an apparition. **Theodore of Mopsuestia**, says, “In the resurrection a better body rises, a body no longer composed of flesh and blood like ours, but a living being, immortal and indestructible.”<sup>1293</sup>

**1422. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another” (1 Cor. 15:40)?**

The apostle Paul comes back to compare our body made of dust like Adam’s body to the body we shall receive which shall be like the body of Christ risen from the dead. There is no comparison between the glory of the body of dust and the glory of the heavenly spiritual body. In heaven, the body will be glorified, radiant, and perfect. Indeed, even in this world, our body of dust experiences the promise of inner glory and splendor — but on the day of the Lord He will “transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Phil. 3:21). And as the Lord Christ promised us, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43).

When He speaks here of heavenly bodies, He may not mean the sun, the moon, and the planets, but rather the angels and the ranks of heaven. They are spirits, but in comparison to God who is simple spirit, they are reckoned as having bodies. If we partake with them in the heavenly life, our bodies become spiritual; but they remain different to those of the heavenly

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<sup>1292</sup> St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Decease of His Brother Satyrus* 2.60–61 (NPNF II/10:183) amended.

<sup>1293</sup> Translators’ Note: cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, “Catechetical Homilies,” in MacLeod, Fredrick G., *Theodore of Mopsuestia*, (Routledge, 2009): p.167.

beings. Perhaps by heavenly bodies He means the body of Christ risen from the dead and the bodies of the saints risen from the dead; and by earthly bodies, He means our bodies here in the temporal life on earth.

The scholar **Origen** says, “Certain beings are called earthly, and among them, i.e., among men, there is no small difference; for some of them are Barbarians, others Greeks; and of the Barbarians some are savage and fierce, and others of a milder disposition. And certain of them live under laws that have been thoroughly approved; others, again, under laws of a more common or severe kind; while some, again, possess customs of an inhuman and savage character, rather than laws.”<sup>1294</sup>

### 1423. Will all the faithful be equal in eternal glory?

St. Paul says, “There is one glory of the sun, another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory” (1 Cor. 15:41).

If, while we strive on earth, the resurrected life with Christ grants us the power to destroy sin and break the sting of death that we may live with the joyful spirit of victory, each believer according to his spiritual potential — then in eternity there are there many mansions (John 14:2). These mansions do not cause jealousy, envy, or pride. Rather, every believer feels that whatever his brothers and sisters have received, he also has received; and thus he desires to be the last of all.

**St. Jerome** says, “In spite of the diversity of glories in heaven, everyone enjoys the same house. The Lord has ascended not to prepare many places, but rather one house. Everyone will share the same house and feel sufficiency and satisfaction, even if the glory of one star differs from the other.”<sup>1295</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “great will be then the difference of glory, though there be but one resurrection ... There being not only a difference between sun and moon, and stars, but also between stars and stars. For what though they be all in the heaven? Yet some have a larger, others a less share of glory. What do we learn from hence? That although they be all in God’s kingdom, all shall not enjoy the same reward; and though all sinners be in hell, all shall not endure the same punishment ... For all indeed rise again, both in power and in incorruption; and in this glory of their incorruption yet are not all in the same state of honor and safety.”<sup>1296</sup>

<sup>1294</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 2.9.3 (ANF 4:290).

<sup>1295</sup> Cf. St. Jerome, *Against Jovinianus* 2.28 (NPNF II/6:409–410).

<sup>1296</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.4–5 (NPNF I/12:251–252) amended.

#### **1424. What is the nature of the resurrected body and what are its characteristics?**

It is a new body but not a completely new creation. From a physical perspective, it is related to the old body, although there are both similarities and differences between them. We can think of a grain of wheat that is sown and brings forth a spike of wheat, or a tiny zygote in his mother's womb who is born as a perfectly formed baby. On the Day of the Lord, the remains of the body in the tomb, or that have dispersed, will be reconstructed as a new body; even those remains the Lord collects from we know not where — for God is not unaware of their location, nor is He incapable of collecting them, wherever they may be scattered. The Lord gathers them in a mysterious way, so that they rise without corruption; a body we must consider to be foreign to this present world.

The body adopts new characteristics befitting eternal life. The matter remains a mystery to us that is beyond our human capacity to know. The Lord of glory spoke of this change, saying, “For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven” (Matt. 22:30), and “nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection” (Luke 20:36). And the apostle Paul says, “Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (1 Cor. 6:13). Here are some of the characteristics of the resurrected body:

**First: It is without corruption** (1 Cor. 15:42). The apostle Paul says, “So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.” The word “sown” is used as a more pleasant euphemism for “buried.” It is “sown in corruption,” for the body is subject to deterioration, corruption, and disintegration. “It is raised in incorruption” as a glorified body is no longer subject to corruption, disintegration, or death.

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “For this body shall be raised not remaining weak as now; but raised the very same body, though by putting on incorruption it shall be fashioned anew — as iron blending with fire becomes fire, or rather as He knows how, the Lord who raises us. This body therefore shall be raised, but it shall abide not such as it now is, but an eternal body; no longer needing for its life such nourishment as now, nor stairs for its ascent, for it shall be made spiritual, a marvelous thing, such as we cannot worthily speak of.”<sup>1297</sup>

**St. Augustine** says:

“Although the saints are spiritually minded, they are still carnal in the corruptible body which is a load upon the soul (cf. *Wisd. of Sol.* 9:15). They will, however, be spiritual also in body when the body sown animal will rise spiritual (cf. 1 Cor. 15:44). They are still prisoners under the law of sin, inasmuch as they are subject to stimulations by desires to which they do not consent. Thus I came to understand this matter as did Hilary, Gregory, Ambrose, and other holy and renowned teachers of the Church, who saw that the Apostle, by

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<sup>1297</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 18.18 (NPNF II/7:139).

his own words, fought strenuously the same battle against carnal concupiscences he did not wish to have.”<sup>1298</sup>

“For as, when the spirit serves the flesh, it is fitly called carnal, so, when the flesh serves the spirit, it will justly be called spiritual. Not that it is converted into spirit, as some fancy from the words, ‘It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption’ (1 Cor. 15:42), but because it is subject to the spirit with a perfect and marvelous readiness of obedience, and responds in all things to the will that has entered on immortality,— all reluctance, all corruption, and all slowness being removed. For the body will not only be better than it was here in its best estate of health, but it will surpass the bodies of our first parents ere they sinned.”<sup>1299</sup>

“For after one manner virginity shall shine there, after another shall wedded chastity shine there, after another shall holy widowhood shine there. They shall shine diversely, but all shall be there.”<sup>1300</sup>

“You have smitten, you have wounded, you have thrown down; but He has been wounded for me who made me. O death, death, He who made me has been wounded for me, and by His Death has overcome you. And then in triumph shall they say, ‘O death, where is your contention? O death, where is your sting?’ [1 Cor. 15:55].”<sup>1301</sup>

“We shall also be renewed in the flesh, though, *When this perishable thing puts on imperishability* (1 Cor. 15:54) so that it may be an ‘enspirited’ body, into which Adam had not yet been changed, but into which he was to have been changed if he had not earned the death of his ‘ensouled’ body by sinning. Finally, the apostle did not say, ‘the body indeed is mortal because of sin,’ but: *the body is dead because of sin* (Rom. 8:10).”<sup>1302</sup>

“Therefore, if I were to ask any good Christian who has a wife, and even though he may still be having children by her, whether he would like to have his wife in that kingdom; mindful in any case of the promises of God, and of that life where this incorruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:53–54); though at present hesitating from the greatness, or at least from a certain degree of love, he would reply with loathing that he is strongly averse to it. Were I to ask him again, whether he would like his wife to live with him there, after the resurrection, when she had undergone that angelic change which is promised to the saints, he would reply that he desired this as strongly as he disapproved of the other.”<sup>1303</sup>

<sup>1298</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian* 6.23.70 (FOTC 35:382).

<sup>1299</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 13.20 (NPNF I/2:255–256).

<sup>1300</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* Sermon 82.3 (NPNF I/6:505).

<sup>1301</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* Sermon 78.10 (NPNF I/6:494) amended.

<sup>1302</sup> *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part I—Books; Volume XIII: On Genesis*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 2002) 6.24.35–36: p. 321.

<sup>1303</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.15.41 (NPNF I/6:18) amended.

From St. Augustine’s words, we understand that spouses should love each other and care for each other’s spiritual lives, so that their relationship with each other is more than just a physical connection that will end and pass away with the passing of the world. We think of this in the same way we think of food: it is not something forbidden or impure, but it must not become a goal in itself for us, for corruptible food does not last forever. Marriage is a holy sacrament with its own dignity and sanctity, established by the Lord of glory Himself.

St. Augustine himself says of it, “The sanctity of the Sacrament is of more avail than the fruitfulness of the womb.”<sup>1304</sup> He also says, “Thus a good Christian is found in one and the same woman to love the creature of God, whom he desires to be transformed and renewed; but to hate the corruptible and mortal conjugal connection and sexual intercourse: i.e. to love in her what is characteristic of a human being, to hate what belongs to her as a wife. So also he loves his enemy, not in as far as he is an enemy, but in as far as he is a man; so that he wishes the same prosperity to come to him as to himself, viz. that he may reach the kingdom of heaven rectified and renewed. This is to be understood both of father and mother and the other ties of blood, that we hate in them what has fallen to the lot of the human race in being born and dying, but that we love what can be carried along with us to those realms where no one says, My Father; but all say to the one God, ‘Our Father’: and no one says: My mother; but all say to that other Jerusalem, Our mother: and no one says: My brother; but each says respecting every other, Our brother. But in fact there will be a marriage on our part as of one spouse (when we have been brought together into unity), with Him who has delivered us from the pollution of this world by the shedding of His own blood. It is necessary, therefore, that the disciple of Christ should hate these things which pass away, in those whom he desires along with himself to reach those things which shall for ever remain; and that he should the more hate these things in them, the more he loves themselves.”<sup>1305</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “However, ‘this corruption’ of the body ‘shall put on incorruption’ (1 Cor. 15:53), but the other of the soul, never; for where incorruption is, there is no corruption. Thus is it a corruption which is incorruptible, which has no end, a deathless death; which would have been, had the body remained deathless. Now if we shall depart into the next world having not corruption, we have that corruption incorruptible and endless; for to be ever burning, and not burnt up, ever wasted by the worm, is corruption incorruptible; like as was the case with the blessed Job. He was corrupted, and died not, and that through a lengthened period, and ‘wasted continually, scraping the clods of dust from his sore’ (Job 7:5 LXX).”<sup>1306</sup>

“Thus lest any, hearing that ‘flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God,’ should suppose that our bodies do not rise again; he adds, ‘this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.’ Now the body is ‘corruptible,’ the body is ‘mortal:’

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<sup>1304</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *On the Good of Marriage* 21 (NPNF I/3:408).

<sup>1305</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.15.41 (NPNF I/6:18).

<sup>1306</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 24 (NPNF I/13:172).



so that the body indeed remains, for it is the body which is put on; but its mortality and corruption vanish away, when immortality and incorruption come upon it. Do not therefore question hereafter how it shall live an endless life, now that you have heard of its becoming incorruptible.”<sup>1307</sup>

**Second: It is glorified** (1 Cor. 15:43). It is a characteristic of the risen body that it is glorified, and the Lord Christ said, “Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father” (Matt. 13:43). While the righteous shine like stars more than the sun, the wicked are in darkness. The apostle Paul says, “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.” Because of sin, the body with all its faculties, senses, and emotions was deprived of all glory, became degraded, and its fate became death. But it will rise in glory to enjoy immortality, eternally free from the bondage of death.

**St. Didymus the Blind** says, “When the body formed by the copulation of male and female is sown, honor and weakness will be in it because it is the body of a perishing soul and shares its characteristics. But when it rises again by the power of God, it appears as a spiritual body, having imperishability, power and honor.”<sup>1308</sup>

**Ambrosiaster** says, “The body is sown in dishonor because it is placed in a coffin where it rots and is eaten by worms. But when it rises again, it will do so in glory, and all trace of this dishonor will vanish.”<sup>1309</sup>

**Third: It is powerful** (1 Cor. 15:43). The apostle Paul says, “It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory.” “It is sown in weakness,” being subject to disease; and “raised in power,” no longer subject to weariness, disease, aging, decay, and death. What is meant by power here? It is not like the power of God or angels, nor is it physical strength, but the power to do that which seems impossible to us now. Also, power here is the opposite of the weakness to which the body was subjected in this world. This power means that the body does not submit to diseases, weaknesses, and physical needs such as eating, drinking, and sleeping; nor can death, corruption, or decay befall it.

**Fourth: It is a spiritual body** (1 Cor. 15:44). The apostle Paul says, “It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” The body that is sown is a biological body like that of animals, made of same kinds of muscles, bones, nerves, and veins and arteries, etc. It has the same physiology, including a digestive system that transfers nutrients to the bloodstream, a respiratory system, etc. But it shall be “raised a spiritual body,” perfect in character, not needing any external source of nutrition, hydration, or air, nor subject to death. Its being is spiritual, and nourishment is spiritual.

<sup>1307</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.3 (NPNF I/12:256) amended.

<sup>1308</sup> St. Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* On 1 Corinthians 15:43 (ACCOS 7:172).

<sup>1309</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* On 1 Corinthians 15:43 (ACCOS 7:172; CSEL 81.3:181).

The “animal body,” sometimes translated as “the natural body,” is the body with which an animal lives out its life of eating, drinking, breathing, perception, rest, and sleep. A “spiritual body” does not mean a *spirit*, for the spirit has no body.

What, then, does it mean that the body will be spiritual? The body will be spiritual, even if it was sown as a natural body. The scholar **Origen** believes that it will be spiritual because it will be delicate and light, similar to the bodies of angels.<sup>1310</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says that the body will be spiritual because the Holy Spirit will abide in the bodies of the righteous for eternity, or because the Holy Spirit shall govern them forever, or because they will be light, or perhaps a combination of all these factors together.<sup>1311</sup> He says, “What do you say? Is not ‘this’ body spiritual? It is indeed spiritual, but that will be much more so. For now oftentimes both the abundant grace of the Holy Spirit flies away on men’s committing great sins; and again, the Spirit continuing present, the life of the flesh depends on the soul: and the result in such a case is a void, without the Spirit. But in that day not so: rather he abides continually in the flesh of the righteous, and the victory shall be His, the natural soul also being present ... believe from hence, that God can also make these corruptible bodies incorruptible and much more excellent than those which are visible.”<sup>1312</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “For as those bodies of ours ... which, being quickened by the Spirit, have the substance, but not the unwieldiness and corruption of flesh.”<sup>1313</sup>

“For as, when the spirit serves the flesh, it is fitly called carnal, so, when the flesh serves the spirit, it will justly be called spiritual. Not that it is converted into spirit, as some fancy from the words, ‘It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption’ (1 Cor. 15:42), but because it is subject to the spirit with a perfect and marvelous readiness of obedience, and responds in all things to the will that has entered on immortality,— all reluctance, all corruption, and all slowness being removed. For the body will not only be better than it was here in its best estate of health, but it will surpass the bodies of our first parents ere they sinned.”<sup>1314</sup>

**Fifth: It is in the image of the body of the Second Adam, the Lord who came down from heaven** (1 Cor. 15: 45–50). We shall put on the image of the heavenly, says the apostle Paul, “And so it is written: The first man Adam became a living being. The last Adam became a life-giving spirit” (1 Cor. 15:45). The apostle Paul refers here to the text of Gen. 2:7 where

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<sup>1310</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *The Commentary of Origen on the Gospel of St Matthew. Vol. 2*, trans., Ronald E. Heine (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018) 17.30: p. 530.

<sup>1311</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.3 (NPNF I/12: 250–251).

<sup>1312</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.5 (NPNF I/12:252) amended.

<sup>1313</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 13.23 (NPNF I/2:257).

<sup>1314</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 13.20 (NPNF I/2:255–256).

we read that Adam became a living soul.<sup>1315</sup> As for the Second Adam who became a life-giving spirit, some Jews speak of the spirit of the Messiah as the spirit that was hovering over the waters (Gen. 1:2) to give life, and that they have always referred to the Messiah as giving life to those who dwell in the dust.

In the Gospel of John we read: “In Him was life” (John 1:4). God raised Adam as a living soul, but he needed life that was external to himself. For this reason, God gave him a wife, whom he called *Eve*, which means “life,” to bring life and to be the mother of all living, but instead, she brought death. But the Second Adam is the incarnate and life-giving Word, who assures us: “I am the life and the resurrection.” The fruit of our connection to our first forefather, Adam is that we bore a natural body. But the fruit of our union with our new forefather, the Second Adam, is that we become a spiritual body when He grants us eternal heavenly life.

**Peter Chrysologus** says, “The holy Apostle today recounts that two men gave an origin to the human race, namely, Adam and Christ. They are two men alike in body, but different in worth; truly similar in the structure of their members, but truly dissimilar in their own beginnings. ‘The first man, Adam,’ the text says, ‘became a living soul; the last Adam became a lifegiving spirit.’ That first one was made by this last One, from whom he got his soul to be alive. This last One was fashioned by His very Self, that He alone might not await life from another, but give it to all men. The first one was moulded from the cheapest earth; the last One came forth from the Virgin’s precious womb. In the case of the former, earth is changed into flesh; in that of the latter, flesh itself is raised up to God.

“Why should I say more? This last is the Adam who placed His own image in the first one when He made him. That is why He both plays the same role as the former and receives his name, in order not to let perish, as far as He was concerned, that which He had made to His own image. The first Adam, and the last Adam. That first one has a beginning; this last One has no limit. For, in truth, this last One is Himself first, as He says: ‘I am the first, and I am the last’ (Isa. 48:2). ‘I am the first,’ that is, without a beginning; ‘I am the last,’ assuredly without an end.

“‘But it is not the spiritual that comes first,’ the text says: ‘but the physical and then the spiritual.’ Surely the earth exists before the fruit, but it is not as precious as the fruit. The earth exacts groans and toil, but the fruit gives substance and life. The Prophet rightly glories over such fruit: ‘Our earth has yielded her fruit’ (Ps. 84:18). What fruit? Clearly, that of which he says elsewhere: ‘Of the fruit of thy womb I will set upon your throne’ (Ps.131:11).

“‘The first man,’ the text continues, ‘was of the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven, heavenly’ ... But, let us hear what follows: ‘As was the earthy man, such are the earthy; and as is the heavenly man, such also are the heavenly.’ How will it be possible for

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<sup>1315</sup> Translators’ Note: While the NKJV renders this phrase “man became a living *being*,” the Hebrew original uses the word *nephesh*, which is more accurately translated “*soul*.”

those who were not born thus as heavenly men to be found heavenly men? Not through their remaining what they were born, but by continuing to be what they were when reborn. Brethren, that is why the heavenly Spirit by a mysterious injection of His light fecundates the womb of the virginal Mother. He desired to bring forth as heavenly beings those whom an origin from an ancestral stock of earth had brought forth as earthy men, in a wretched state. He wanted to bring them to the likeness of their Creator. So, let us who have already been reborn, and reformed to the image of our Creator, fulfill what the Apostle commands.

“Therefore, even as we have borne the likeness of the earthy, let us bear also the likeness of the heavenly’ ... Yes, let us who have been reborn to the likeness of our Lord (as we mentioned) ... and God adopted as His sons—let us bear the image of our Creator in a perfect reproduction. Let it be a reproduction not of that majesty in which He is unique, but of that innocence, simplicity, meekness, patience, humility, mercy, and peacefulness by which He deigned to become and to be one with us.”<sup>1316</sup>

#### **1425. Is the body that will rise other than the body that we have now in this world?**

The scholar **Origen** says, “So also are we to consider, with respect to the nature of the body, that the one which we now make use of in a state of meanness, and corruption, and weakness, is not a different body from that which we shall possess in incorruption, and in power, and in glory; but that the same body, when it has cast away the infirmities in which it is now entangled, shall be transmuted into a condition of glory, being rendered spiritual, so that what was a vessel of dishonour may, when cleansed, become a vessel unto honour, and an abode of blessedness.”<sup>1317</sup>

#### **1426. Which comes first, the natural body or the spiritual body?**

The apostle Paul says, “However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual” (1 Cor. 15:46). The physical or natural body is first because it is the body with which Adam was created to live on earth. The spiritual body is this same body after it is glorified and clothes the soul in the resurrection, and lives in heaven as a spirit-like being.

**St. Augustine** says, “Of these two first parents of the human race, then, Cain was the first-born, and he belonged to the city of men; after him was born Abel, who belonged to the city of God. For as in the individual the truth of the apostle's statement is discerned, ‘that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural, and afterward that which is spiritual’ (1 Cor. 15:46), whence it comes to pass that each man, being derived from a condemned stock, is first of all born of Adam evil and carnal, and becomes good and spiritual only afterwards, when he is grafted into Christ by regeneration: so was it in the human race as a whole.”<sup>1318</sup>

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<sup>1316</sup> Peter Chrysologus, *Selected Sermons* 117 (FOTC 17:199–202) amended.

<sup>1317</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *De Principiis (On First Principles)* 3.6.6 (ANF 4:347).

<sup>1318</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 15.1 (NPNF I/2:284).

“But by a spiritual body is meant one which has been made subject to spirit in such wise that it is adapted to a heavenly habitation, all frailty and every earthly blemish having been changed and converted into heavenly purity and stability.”<sup>1319</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “And he says not, why, but is content with the ordinance of God, having the evidence from the facts testifying to that most excellent œconomy of God, and implying that our state is always going forward to the better; at the same time by this also adding credibility to his [Paul’s] argument. For if the lesser have come to pass, much more ought we to expect the better [2 Cor. 5:17] ... For so the husbandman, when he sees the grain dissolving, does not mourn.”<sup>1320</sup>

#### 1427. To whom do we cling: the earthly person or the heavenly Lord?

We strive in the Lord to cling to Him and become one with Him so that He may establish His kingdom in us, and that our lives may be guided by the Holy Spirit. In so doing, we experience a token of heaven, and are prepared to be attached to the heavenly Second Adam, and dust shall have no place in us. The apostle Paul says, “The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven” (1 Cor. 15:47). “Of the earth” does not mean that he merely walks on earth that is dust, but rather that he bears an earthly nature that is ephemeral.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For the first difference was between the present life and that which is to come: but this between that before grace and that after grace.”<sup>1321</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “The Lord who was heavenly became earthly that He might make heavenly those who were earthly; that is, from immortal He became mortal by ‘taking the form of a servant (Phil. 2:7), not by changing the nature of the Lord; that He might make immortal those who were mortal by imparting the grace of the Lord, not by retaining the offense of the servant.”<sup>1322</sup>

And **St. Hilary of Poitiers** says, “*The first man was from the soil of the ground, the second man from heaven* (1 Cor. 15:47). Calling Him ‘Man’ he expresses His birth from the Virgin, who in the exercise of her office as mother, performed the duties of her sex in the conception and birth of man. And when he says, *The second man from heaven* he testifies His origin from the Holy Spirit, Who came upon the Virgin (Luke 1:35). As He is then man, and from heaven, this Man was born of the Virgin, and conceived of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>1323</sup>

<sup>1319</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *A Treatise on Faith and the Creed* 6.13 (NPNF I/3:326).

<sup>1320</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 41.6–7 (NPNF I/12:252–253) amended.

<sup>1321</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.1 (NPNF I/12:255).

<sup>1322</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume V (204–270)* 205 To Consentius (FOTC 32:16).

<sup>1323</sup> St. Hilary of Poitiers, *On the Trinity* 10.17 (NPNF II/9:186) amended.

**1428. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:48)?**

Just as Adam was formed from dust, so are his descendants: subject to weakness, decay, and death. And just as the heavenly Man is, so is he who unites with Him and shares in His heavenly glory.

The scholar **Origen** says, “... if you remain in that which is first, which is of the earth, you will be rejected, unless you change yourself, unless you have been converted, unless, having been made ‘heavenly,’ you have received ‘the image of the heavenly.’”<sup>1324</sup>

**Maximus of Turin**, says, “Adam is formed from the mire (cf. Gen. 2:7) by the hands of God, while Christ is formed in the womb by the Spirit of God.”<sup>1325</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “What then? Did not this Man too die? He died indeed, but received no injury therefrom, yes, rather by this He put an end to death.”<sup>1326</sup>

And **Peter Chrysologus** says, “But, let us hear what follows: ‘As was the earthy man, such are the earthy; and as is the heavenly man, such also are the heavenly.’ How will it be possible for those who were not born thus as heavenly men to be found heavenly men? Not through their remaining what they were born, but by continuing to be what they were when reborn. Brethren, that is why the heavenly Spirit by a mysterious injection of His light fecundates the womb of the virginal Mother. He desired to bring forth as heavenly beings those whom an origin from an ancestral stock of earth had brought forth as earthy men, in a wretched state. He wanted to bring them to the likeness of their Creator. So, let us who have already been reborn, and reformed to the image of our Creator, fulfill what the Apostle commands.

“‘Therefore, even as we have borne the likeness of the earthly, let us bear also the likeness of the heavenly.’ Let it be granted that all this was a necessity: that we, formed from earth, could not produce heavenly fruits; that, born from concupiscence, we could not avoid concupiscence; that we, born from the powerful attractions of the flesh, had to carry the base load of its attractions; that we, accepted into this world for our home, were captives to its evils. Yes, let us who have been reborn to the likeness of our Lord (as we mentioned), whom a Virgin conceived, and the Spirit enlivened, and modesty carried, and integrity brought to birth, and innocence nourished, and sanctity taught, and virtue trained, and God adopted as His sons-let us bear the image of our Creator in a perfect reproduction. Let it be a reproduction not of that majesty in which He is unique, but of that innocence, simplicity, meekness, patience, humility, mercy, and peacefulness by which He deigned to become and

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<sup>1324</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *Homilies on Genesis* 9 (FOTC 71:151).

<sup>1325</sup> Maximus of Turin, *The Sermons of St. Maximus of Turin* 50A.2 (ACW 50:122).

<sup>1326</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.1 (NPNF I/12:255) amended.

to be one with us. May the bothersome itch of vices cease, and the fatal allurements of sins be overcome, and damnable rage, the source of crimes, be checked. May all the fog of worldly display be dispelled from our senses. May all the illusion of worldly desire be cast out of our minds. May we desire Christ's poverty which stores its everlasting riches in heaven. May we preserve complete holiness of soul and body, that we may bear and enhance our Creator's image in ourselves, in regard not to its size, but to our way of acting."<sup>1327</sup>

**1429. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Cor. 15:49)?**

In the resurrection, the body is clothed with glory so that it becomes like the body of the risen Christ: able to penetrate earthly barriers; pass through the air; and shine with a splendor reflected on it from the splendor of Christ. As children of Adam, we are born in his likeness, and we submit to what he submits to. However, now when we are united with the Heavenly One, we are granted His likeness also. By saying, “we shall bear,” he clarifies that the image of the Heavenly One is like a garment that we wear and in which we are hidden; for our body remains, but it bears a new nature shining with great splendor.

The scholar **Origen** says, “If anyone still bears the image of the earthly according to the outer man, then is moved by earthly desire and love; but the desire and love of him who bears the image of the heavenly according the inner man are heavenly (cf. 1 Cor. 15:49).”<sup>1328</sup>

**1430. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50)?**

By “flesh and blood,” he means not the body in itself, but whatever is mortal and corrupt in it, whatever bears the trace of sin. Being our corrupt body, it is unable to enjoy the divine kingdom so long as it remains in this condition.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “for by flesh he here denotes men’s evil deeds ... wherefore also he adds, ‘neither does corruption inherit incorruption,’ i.e., neither shall wickedness inherit that glory and the enjoyment of the things incorruptible ... For he nowhere calls the body ‘corruption,’ since neither is it corruption, but a thing corruptible.”<sup>1329</sup>

**St. Jerome** says, “Let us by no means scorn the flesh, but let us reject its works. Let us not despise the body that will reign in heaven with Christ. ‘Flesh and blood can obtain no part in the kingdom of God’ (1 Cor. 15:50); no, not flesh and blood of themselves, but the works of the flesh.”<sup>1330</sup>

<sup>1327</sup> Peter Chrysologus, *Selected Sermons* 117 (FOTC 17:201–202).

<sup>1328</sup> Origen of Alexandria, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* Prologue 2 (ACW 26:29).

<sup>1329</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.2 (NPNF I/12:256) amended.

<sup>1330</sup> St. Jerome, *The Homilies of Saint Jerome, Volume 1 (1–59 on the Psalms)* 54 (FOTC 48:381).

**St. Gregory of Nazianzus** says, “Then shall I see Cæsarius himself, no longer in exile, no longer laid upon a bier, no longer the object of mourning and pity, but brilliant, glorious, heavenly.”<sup>1331</sup>

The apostle Paul says, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—” (1 Cor. 15:51). He reveals here a mystery of which they were previously ignorant: that not all humanity die, but all change. Of this, the Jews were not aware.

**St. Augustine** says, “Since, then, there can be no resurrection unless death has preceded, and since we can in this passage understand by sleep nothing else than death, how shall *all* either sleep or rise again if so many persons whom Christ shall find in the body shall neither sleep nor rise again? If, then, we believe that the saints who shall be found alive at Christ’s coming, and shall be caught up to meet Him, shall in that same ascent pass from mortal to immortal bodies, we shall find no difficulty in the words of the apostle, either when he says, ‘That which you sow is not quickened, except it die,’ or when he says, ‘We shall all rise,’ or ‘all sleep,’ for not even the saints shall be quickened to immortality unless they first die, however briefly; and consequently they shall not be exempt from resurrection which is preceded by sleep, however brief. And why should it seem to us incredible that that multitude of bodies should be, as it were, sown in the air, and should in the air forthwith revive immortal and incorruptible, when we believe, on the testimony of the same apostle, that the resurrection shall take place in the twinkling of an eye, and that the dust of bodies long dead shall return with incomprehensible facility and swiftness to those members that are now to live endlessly?”<sup>1332</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “they too [who are still alive at the Coming of the Lord] are mortal. ‘Do not therefore, because you die, on this account fear,’ says he, ‘as if you should not rise again: for there are, there are some who shall even escape this, and yet this suffices them not for that resurrection, but even those bodies which do not die must be changed and be transformed into incorruption’ ... The expression, ‘we,’ he uses not of himself, but of them that are then found alive.”<sup>1333</sup>

### **1431. What does the apostle Paul mean by “the last trumpet”?**

The apostle Paul says, “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Cor. 15:52). By saying “in a moment” he means an indivisible point in time, and the words “in the twinkling of an eye” refer to what is almost an unmeasurable time — in that timeframe, all of this is achieved. This suggests that the resurrection will occur through a

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<sup>1331</sup> St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Select Orations* 7.21 (NPNF II/7:237). Translators’ Note: Cæsarius was Gregory’s recently deceased brother.

<sup>1332</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.20 (NPNF I/2:439).

<sup>1333</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.3 (NPNF I/12:256) amended.



divine power that needs not time to accomplish it. The blowing of the trumpet on the day of the coming of the Lord is a biblical teaching found in Zech. 9:14; Matt. 24:31; and 1 Thess. 4:16.

**St. Jerome** says, “Then at the sound of the trumpet (1 Thess. 4:16) the earth and its peoples shall tremble, but you shall rejoice. The world shall howl at the Lord who comes to judge it, and the tribes of the earth shall smite the breast ... You may seem a poor man and country bred, but then you shall exult and laugh, and say: Behold my crucified Lord, behold my judge.”<sup>1334</sup>

### 1432. How does death lose its authority?

The apostle Paul says, “So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Cor. 15:54). The sword of death will no longer reign over humanity but will shatter before immortal eternity. Here, death is personified and presented as a predatory entity that swallows up humanity throughout the generations; but with the resurrection of the body and the downfall of the kingdom of death, death itself is swallowed up and is destroyed by eternity. God reigns and death no longer exists. Indeed, our body in the world remains under the sway of the sword of death until the resurrection is accomplished, when the thorn of death will no longer exist and death will no longer have any authority.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Not so much as a fragment of it remains nor a hope of returning, incorruption having consumed corruption.”<sup>1335</sup>

The apostle Paul says, “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (1 Cor. 15:55). Here he personifies death and Hades, making death a thorn like the prod used to drive an ox with repeated jabs; and making Hades a kingdom that has utterly conquered humanity, and from whose empire no one escapes.

Ancient inscriptions depict death as a skeleton with a crown on its skull and a spear in its hand with which to kill everyone. The Jews depict the angel of death carrying a sword from which deadly drops fall into the mouths of all people.

The word “tomb” is often used in place of Hades, as it is the place where souls are separated from human bodies.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “You saw the thing proclaimed working in others — those who were about to die, the child which had just ceased to live, the young man at the edge of the grave, the putrefying corpse, all alike restored by one command to life. Do you seek for

<sup>1334</sup> St. Jerome, *Letters* 14.11 (NPNF II/6:18).

<sup>1335</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.4 (NPNF I/12:256).

those who have come to death by wounds and bloodshed? Does any feebleness of life-giving power hinder the grace in them? Behold Him Whose hands were pierced with nails: behold Him Whose side was transfixed with a spear; pass your fingers through the print of the nails; thrust your hand into the spear-wound ... If He then has been raised, well may we utter the Apostle's exclamation, 'How say some that there is no resurrection of the dead?' (1 Cor. 15:12)."<sup>1336</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, "But when the flesh shall be in harmony with the mind, and 'death shall be swallowed up in victory' (1 Cor. 15:54), so that no carnal desires shall remain for the mind to be in conflict with, when strife in the earth shall have passed away, the war of the heart be over, and that be gone by which is spoken, 'the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are contrary the one to the other; so that you cannot do the things that you would' (Gal. 5:17)."<sup>1337</sup>

**St. Athanasius** says, "For by nature human beings are afraid of death and of the dissolution of the body. But this is most amazing, that one who has put on the faith of the cross scorns even things according to nature, and is not afraid of death because of Christ."<sup>1338</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, "But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory ... Do you see his noble soul? How even as one who is offering sacrifices for victory, having become inspired and seeing already things future as things past, he leaps and tramples upon death fallen at his feet, and shouts a cry of triumph over its head where it lies, exclaiming mightily and saying, 'O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?' It is clean gone, it is perished, it is utterly vanished away, and in vain have you done all those former things. For He not only disarmed death and vanquished it, but even destroyed it, and made it quite cease from being."<sup>1339</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, "Where is death now? Look for it in Christ, it's no longer there; it was there, however, and it died there. Oh, what life, the death of death! Be of good heart, it will also die in us. What has first occurred in the head will also be given to the members; death will also die in us. But when? At the end of the world, in the resurrection of the dead, which we believe, about which we have no doubts."<sup>1340</sup>

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<sup>1336</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Making of Man* 25.12 (NPNF II/5:416) amended.

<sup>1337</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 6.8 (NPNF I/6:276) amended.

<sup>1338</sup> St. Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation* 28 (PP44A:109–111).

<sup>1339</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.4 (NPNF I/12:256–257) amended.

<sup>1340</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Works of St Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century: Part III—Sermons; Volume VII: Sermons 230–272B*, trans., Edmund Hill, ed., John E. Rotelle (New City Press, 1993) 233.5: p. 34.

“For then not only shall we not obey any enticement of sin, but there will be no such enticements of the kind we are commanded not to obey.”<sup>1341</sup>

“Because of the necessary activities of this life, health is not to be despised until ‘this mortal shall put on immortality’ (1 Cor. 15:54), and that is the true and perfect and unending health which is not refreshed by corruptible pleasure when it fails through earthly weakness, but is maintained by heavenly strength and made young by eternal incorruptibility.”<sup>1342</sup>

“Because human nature was subjected to an enemy, man must first be rescued from his power, that he may fight him; then, if his life in this flesh is prolonged, he is assisted in the conflict that he may overcome the enemy; and finally the victor will be beatified, that he may reign, and at the very end he will ask: ‘Death, where is your devouring?’ (Hos. 13:14).”<sup>1343</sup>

### 1433. What is the sting of death?

The apostle Paul says, “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law” (1 Cor. 15:56). If there was no sin, there would be no death. A person’s disobedience is what isolates him from God the source of life, so that he succumbs to the dominion of death and its oppressive law. Without the law, we were incapable of discerning sin (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13). The law gave us the opportunity to reveal the disobedience to the will of God that we carry within us, and so sin lived in us. Sin is the mother of death, for through one person sin entered the world, and death through sin (Rom. 5:12).

**St. Cyril of Jerusalem** says, “The sting of death is drawn by Baptism. For you go down into the water, bearing your sins, but the invocation of grace, having sealed your soul, suffers you not afterwards to be swallowed up by the terrible dragon. Having gone down dead in sins, you come up alive in righteousness.”<sup>1344</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “for prohibition increases the desire of illicit action, if righteousness is not so loved that the desire of sin is conquered by that love. But unless divine grace aid us, we cannot love nor delight in true righteousness.”<sup>1345</sup>

“For where the law forbids [something], we sin more seriously than if we were not forbidden by the law. However, when grace is added, we then fulfill without difficulty and most willingly that very thing which the law had oppressively commanded ... [We are] no longer slaves of the law through fear, but friends through love and slaves of the righteousness which was the very source of the law’s promulgation.”<sup>1346</sup>

<sup>1341</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume IV (165–203)* 196 To Asellicus (FOTC 30:336).

<sup>1342</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Letters, Volume II (83–130)* 130 To Proba (FOTC 18:382).

<sup>1343</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Against Julian* 6.20.65 (FOTC 35:377) amended.

<sup>1344</sup> St. Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* Lecture 3.11–12 (NPNF II/7:17) amended.

<sup>1345</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 13.5 (NPNF I/2:247).

<sup>1346</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Eighty-Three Different Questions* 66.1 (FOTC 70:140).

“When this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. Where, O death, is your contention?’ There rightly, ‘O death, where is your sting?’ (1 Cor. 15:54–55). You seek its place, and find it not. What is the ‘sting of death?’ What is, ‘O death, where is your sting?’ Where is sin? You seek, and it is nowhere. For ‘the sting of death is sin.’ They are the Apostle’s words, not mine. Then shall it be said, ‘O death, where is your sting?’ Sin shall nowhere be, neither to surprise you, nor to assault you, nor to inflame your conscience.”<sup>1347</sup>

And **St. John Chrysostom** says, “Because without the law sin was weak, being practiced indeed, but not able so entirely to condemn: since although the evil took place, it was not so clearly pointed out. So that it was no small change which the law brought in, first causing us to know sin better, and then enhancing the punishment ... Yes, to show that it was not the law of itself which gives strength to sin, Christ Himself fulfilled it all and was without sin.”<sup>1348</sup>

#### **1434. How do we obtain victory over sin and death?**

The apostle Paul says, “But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:57). The life of victory grants the believer a life of thanksgiving to God. The resurrection of the Lord equips us to present a sacrifice of thanksgiving acceptable to God.

It is not possible to achieve victory by ourselves — victory is the gift of our Lord Jesus Christ to us.

**Ambrosiaster** says, “Christ did not win the victory for himself but for our benefit. For when he became a man, he remained God, and by overcoming the devil, he who never sinned gained the victory for us, who were bound in death because of sin. The death of Christ defeated the devil, who was forced to surrender all those who had died because of sin.”<sup>1349</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “Lest we do what is pleasant but unlawful, and lest in this warfare, filled so abundantly with toil and peril, we either hope to secure victory by our own strength, or attribute it when secured to our own strength, and not to His grace of whom the apostle says, ‘Thanks be unto God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 15:57).”<sup>1350</sup>

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<sup>1347</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* 81.7 (NPNF I/6:503) amended.

<sup>1348</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.4 (NPNF I/12:257) amended.

<sup>1349</sup> Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* On 1 Corinthians 15:57 (ACCOS 7:184; CSEL 81.3:186-87).

<sup>1350</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 22.23 (NPNF I/2:501).

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “For the trophy He Himself erected, but the crowns He has caused us also to partake of. And this not of debt, but of mere mercy.”<sup>1351</sup>

The apostle Paul concludes his discourse on the resurrection of the dead, saying, “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58). Faith in the resurrection of Christ grants us victory over sin. Therefore, we offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving, not only with words, but also with a fruitful life in the Lord. The apostle Paul calls us to live the resurrected life as a token of enjoying eternal life.

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “Just and seasonable is this exhortation after all that had gone before. For nothing so disquiets as the thought that we are buffeted without cause or profit ... And he did not say, ‘working that which is good,’ but ‘abounding;’ that we might do it abundantly, and might overpass the lists ... For that former labor on man’s expulsion from paradise, was the punishment of his transgressions; but this is the ground of the rewards to come.”<sup>1352</sup>

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<sup>1351</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.4 (NPNF I/12:257) amended.

<sup>1352</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* 42.5 (NPNF I/12:257) amended.



## 7

**Heaven and the Jerusalem Above****1435. What do we mean by the word “heaven”?**

The Jews thought that there are three heavens:

The first heaven is the atmosphere of the planet earth, which St. Basil the Great calls the heaven of the birds.

The second heaven is the firmament [or space] wherein are the planets and stars.

And the third heaven is called the heaven of heavens, wherein are the throne of God and the ranks of heaven. It is also called Paradise. The apostle Paul says, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago, whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows, such a one was caught up to the third heaven ... how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words which it is not lawful for a man to utter” (2 Cor. 12:2–4)

The Church believes that paradise is a waiting place for the souls of the righteous that depart from the body. And while we believe that God is everywhere, He is described as abiding in heaven. In the prayer of Solomon on the occasion of the consecration of the temple, he says, “And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and when You hear, forgive” (1 Kings 8:30). In Lord Christ’s dialogue with Nicodemus, He says, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). And we read in the Book of Acts that to those present at the Lord’s ascension it was said, “The same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

**1436. How can we know that heaven is real?**

**First.** The late Bishop Youannis of Gharbia proposes that the first piece of evidence is that sense or intuition present in every person that there is a heaven. He cites the French scholar **Fustel de Coulanges** who undertook extensive academic research that was published in 1864 [in French] under the title of *La Cité Antique (The Ancient City)*. De Coulanges writes: “Go back far as we may in the history of the Indo-European race, of which the Greeks and Italians are branches, and we do not find that this race has ever thought that after this short life all was finished for man. The most ancient generations, long before there were philosophers, believed in a second existence after the present. They looked upon death not as a dissolution of our being, but simply as a change of life ... when a body was buried, those ancient peoples believed that they buried something that was living ... It was a custom, at the close of a funeral ceremony, to call the soul of the deceased three times by the name he

had borne. They wished that he might live happy under ground. Three times they said to him, Fare thee well. They added, May the earth rest lightly upon thee.”<sup>1353</sup>

**Second.** This innate intuition is found throughout the world. Even if a person tries to suppress it, at the moment of impending death it often happens that he will feel a deep regret at having tarnished his life by ignoring or denying this instinct. Many of those who denied faith in their youth returned to it in the latter part of their life, especially as they wrestled with their own death and felt great remorse over their denial of divine providence and eternal life. By way of example, the following are said to have had this kind of experience: Napoleon Bonaparte; the famous French philosopher Voltaire; the American scientist Edison; and the Russian philosopher and author Tolstoy.

**Third.** The joyful manner in which the martyrs and saints faced death, proclaiming their longing to meet their Savior, the Giver of joy to every heart. Similarly, St. Paul says, “For I am hard pressed between two, having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better” (Phil. 1:23). On the other hand, we hear that many famous atheists were struck with terror and dismay when they felt their moment of death drawing near.

**Fourth.** The testimony of the word of God. David says, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork” (Ps. 19:1). After building the temple, Solomon says, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” (1 Kings 8:27). The Lord Jesus says, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). And He also told Nathaniel, “Most assuredly I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending upon the Son of Man” (John 1:51).

**1437. What does this mean: “But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth for it is His footstool” (Matt. 5:34–35)?**

**His Grace Bishop Youannis** tells the following story: “There was a man who lived in a tent in the desert. Some scientists used to go to this desert in search of monuments. When they reached this man’s tent, they heard him praying inside the tent and waited until he finished his prayers. Then they came forward to meet him. They told him, mockingly, ‘How do you know for sure there is a god who answers your prayers?’ He answered them, saying, ‘How did you know that a man visited me in my tent last night?’ They responded, ‘We came to know this by means of his footprints in the sand.’ He said, ‘I, too, know there is a God

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<sup>1353</sup> Numa Denis Fustel De Coulanges, *The Ancient City: A Study on the Religion, Laws, and Institutions of Greece and Rome* (Kitchener: Batoche Books, 2001) 1.1: pp. 9–10. See Bishop Youannis of Gharbia, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii - St. Paul Brotherhood, 2021) Kindle Edition: loc. 297–302.



because I can see His prints everywhere.’ Yes, God leaves His traces around us in everything and in everyplace.”<sup>1354</sup>

St. Paul says, “Because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world, His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened” (Rom. 1:19–21).

**St. Augustine** takes these apostolic words to mean that God gifts the world to us for our use, but not for our selfish gratification; for through this world we see invisible things and cling to the spiritual and heavenly that we glimpsed in the material and temporal.<sup>1355</sup>

**St Athanasius the Apostolic** says, “God by His own Word gave the Universe the Order it has, in order that since He is by nature invisible, men might be enabled to know Him at any rate by His works. For often the artist even when not seen is known by his works.”<sup>1356</sup>

**St. John Chrysostom** says, “The heavens may be silent, but the sight of them emits a voice, that is louder than a trumpet’s sound; instructing us not by the ear, but through the medium of the eyes; for the latter is a sense which is more sure and more distinct than the former.”<sup>1357</sup>

#### 1438. Is nature a witness to the reality of heaven?

**His Grace Bishop Youannis** says, “Nature is the first and oldest witness of heaven, God’s presence, and the existence of another life in heaven.”<sup>1358</sup> He quotes Sir Isaac Newton (1642–1727), the English scholar of science who said, “I have seen God in the works of nature and its laws. These prove that the existence of wisdom and power are not materialistic.”<sup>1359</sup>

<sup>1354</sup> Bishop Youannis of Gharbia, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii - St. Paul Brotherhood, 2021) Kindle Edition: loc. 344–349.

<sup>1355</sup> St Augustine of Hippo, *On Christian Doctrine* 1.4 (NPNF I/2:523).

<sup>1356</sup> St Athanasius of Alexandria, *Against the Heathen* 3.35.1 (NPNF II/4:22).

<sup>1357</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Statues* 9.4 (NPNF I/9:401).

<sup>1358</sup> Bishop Youannis of Gharbia, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii - St. Paul Brotherhood, 2021) Kindle Edition: loc. 359.

<sup>1359</sup> Bishop Youannis of Gharbia, *Heaven: An Orthodox Christian Perspective* (Coptic Orthodox Diocese of Los Angeles, Southern California, and Hawaii - St. Paul Brotherhood, 2021) Kindle Edition: loc. 366–367. Translators’ Note: Cf. this quote from Isaac Newton and J. E. McGuire, “Newton’s ‘Principles of Philosophy’: An Intended Preface for the 1704 ‘Opticks’ and a Related Draft Fragment.” *The British Journal for the History of Science* 5, no. 2 (1970) pp. 178–86: 183: “These and such like considerations are the most convincing arguments for such a being and have convinced mankind in all ages that the

In the natural world, we find numerous evidences of the existence of the Great Creator. Some examples are:

**First:** When we bury a small seed and water it, it seems as though it has died; yet after a while it grows and blossoms and becomes fruitful.

**Second:** a caterpillar hides behind a leaf in a berry tree and makes very fine silk threads to cover itself. It appears as though it has died, but in the end it becomes a chrysalis and then a butterfly.

**Third:** in snowy regions, the tree leaves fall in the autumn and the trees look as if they are dead. However, during the spring, the snow melts and life comes back to the trees.

**1439. Are there any contemporary witnesses to the faithful challenging death and to their joy and that of their families in the face of martyrdom?**

A series of recent events — like the bombing of the entrance to the church at Sidi-Bishr, Alexandria — have manifested the clear consolation from God felt by the families of over twenty martyrs; and by those in the Church’s hospital who were critically wounded, yet did not so much as groan from pain despite in one case suffering burns to more than 85% of his body. We also witnessed children with crushed bones in their feet, standing and thanking God that they had been counted worthy to be wounded for the sake of the crucified Lord of glory.

Many people from nations across the world were deeply affected by the attitude of the martyrs of Libya. Those who killed them thought they were terrifying the Copts by publishing a video of their martyrdom; but the fruit of it turned out to be that so many people witnessed true love for God and the power of divine grace, and the hearts of many were opened up to love the Heavenly One. The world became aware of the Church of Martyrs. It is impossible to count the multitude of blessings this event bestowed upon the Church or the number of people who have been inspired to repentance all over the world because of recent events such as this.

**1440. What is the heavenly perspective on the recent spate of bombings of churches?**

On the day following the explosion at the Church of the Two Saints at Alexandria — which was founded by the late **Fr. Bishoy Kamel** — I was contacted by one of the servants in Sydney, Australia. He had previously served at the Church of St. George the Martyr in Sporting, Alexandria, and with joy, this is what he told me: He was at his work in Sydney when he learned of the explosion at the Church of the Two Saints. He cried from the depths of his heart, asking: How must Fr. Bishoy Kamel be reacting in paradise; or Tamav Irene; or

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world and all the species of things therein were originally framed by his power and wisdom. And to lay aside this argument is unphilosophical.”

St. Abu-Sefein the Martyr? He went to his house with such bitterness in his soul that he fell asleep in his chair ... and in his sleep he saw the heavens open, and the Lord of Glory seated on His throne, and Fr. Bishoy Kamel going forth to welcome the saints to paradise and present them to the Lord Christ; and Fr. Bishoy exulted in those martyrs. The soul of the servant from Sydney rejoiced, and he telephoned me to tell me how much the late Fr. Bishoy cares while in Paradise and how he rejoices in the martyrs.

When a church named after **Pope Cyril VI** was founded in Los Angeles, someone said to me that a person came forward bearing an envelope with a large sum of money and told the Coptic priest: “A group of us, Christians and Indians, gathered together and learned that this is the Church whose members were martyred in Libya because they were Christians. Thus, we consider the establishment of your church in this area to be a blessing for us all.”

#### **1441. How does St. John conclude the Book of Revelation, regarding the Day of the Lord?**

St. John concludes the Book of Revelation by describing the heavenly Jerusalem — or as **St. Augustine** calls it, “The heavenly Church”<sup>1360</sup> — the glories and blessings of the heavenly Church, and the desire of our Lord Jesus Christ to come quickly (Rev. 22:20–21) to take His bride the queen to His throne.

Many authors, poets, and philosophers such as Plato depict ideal cities (in their estimation) prescribing for them laws, arrangements, and principles dictated by their philosophy and way of thinking. However, very soon, mistaken or unrealistic principles infiltrate their models, and their ideal cities turn out in fact to be deficient and riddled with shortcomings.

St. John does not imitate their example but rather, ascending by the Spirit, his vision is of a true, ideal, and immortal Church, which is in essence “the tabernacle of God ... with men” (Rev. 21:3). As this was difficult to depict or express in human language, he recorded for us what he actually saw, but in simple symbols that leave it to us to go deeper into them and savor the nature of this singular, heavenly city; so far as our spiritual stature allows us to comprehend through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

#### **1442. What is meant by “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1)?**

The earth in which we now live and the heaven under which we live witness to the power of our Creator and His sublime care. He has not left us wanting for anything. For the earth with all its laws, resources, and marvels is there to serve us, and the sun, moon, and stars, all

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<sup>1360</sup> Cf. St. Augustine of Hippo, *City of God* 20.17 (NPNF I/2:436).

work for our benefit; and yet, this creation cannot compare to the new heaven and the new earth ...

- a. On this our present earth, we await that death from which none have escaped. But, in the new earth, we are not subject to time passing or ending. All our life is eternal. We see all things anew, never ebbing, never aging, never ending.
- b. On our earth, we endure the trials that befall humanity so that we can become ready to travel to our heavenly home.
- c. On our earth, we live by faith and thereby taste a token of heaven. However, in the new earth, never shall true joy depart from us, we will take pleasure in seeing the heavenly beings and the saints living the blessed life, and we will consider their glories as our own glory.
- d. We cherish our membership in the Church and experience all the activity of heaven so that we may prepare for the glory which the Lord has prepared for us.
- e. For **St. Augustine**, the new heaven and the new earth are our souls and bodies. On this earth, the devil wars against us to rob us of our hope of eternal life. But on the Day of the Lord when our souls unite with our bodies newly risen from the dead, the enemy of good will not dare to fight against us, for we shall bear the reflection of the glory of the Lord in our whole being.
- f. On our earth we boast in those of our relatives and acquaintances who live successful lives. But, in the new earth, we cherish the friendship we share with all the inhabitants of heaven and consider them all to be our brothers and sisters, with Christ the Head of us all. We become as one family.

#### **1443. What are the characteristics of the heavenly Church?**

It is one, new (Rev. 21:1–8), holy (Rev. 21:9–11), catholic, and apostolic (Rev. 21:9–11) Church. St. John says, “I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the new earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1). The Lord Jesus taught that new wine cannot be put into old skins, but only in new skins [Matt. 9:17]. Likewise, we are the wine of His kingdom — we take off the corruptible body and put on the incorruptible, we take off this mortal body and put on the immortal. We rise in glory and power with spiritual bodies (1 Cor. 15:42–44).

As children of the new kingdom, we ought not to turn back to this earth. Our Lord Jesus insisted that “heaven and earth will pass away” [Mark 13:31]. The apostle Peter also assures us that when the Day of the Lord comes, “the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat. Nevertheless, we according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:12–13).

Perhaps the words “A new heaven and a new earth” have a different meaning too: that, when all that now exists ceases to be, we will return to a new heaven where we meet the “Lord, God of heaven” and the inhabitants of heaven and enter into in a new, inspired fellowship in perfection and fullness. We will also meet our brothers and sisters who were with us on this earth in “the new earth” in a relationship that is a new kind of love in utter and perfect unity in the person of our Lord Jesus. Therefore, he says, “Also, there was no more sea” (Rev. 21:1). There is no place for the sea, for the sea refers to divisions that divide countries, cities, or continents; but the Church in heaven has nothing to divide her members from each other. The sea also symbolizes agitation and unrest (Isa. 57:20), but in the heavenly Church, no evil person can hide. Rather, through the perfection of unity, inner and outer peace will prevail.

#### **1444. Why is it called “the city” (Rev. 21:2)?**

“Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven, from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). He called it the city, but in truth it is the dwelling of God with people. When he wanted to name it, he called it “the new Jerusalem,” for that which is eschatological is new and remains new, impervious to the old.

The mystery of its holiness and newness is that it is “descending from heaven from God.” For while it is the very heavens, yet it is “descending from heaven” as a tender mother who throws open her arms and races to hug her child whom she has long missed. In this manner eternity yearns for us, for we are not strangers to it, but members of it. By descending from heaven from God, the holy city expresses to us the love of God for humanity and His longing to meet with us; for He is always the One who initiates love.

When the apostle saw that everything in that city was beautiful, he said, “Prepared as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2). The Heavenly One descended, seeking the salvation of all; and here His city descends, cherishing His beloved bride.

#### **1445. How did the apostle John transmit the heavenly voice?**

[The voice from] heaven could find no better name for the new city, the new earth, and new heaven than “the tabernacle of God with men” (Rev. 21:3). O the greatness of the sublime love of God! It is as though God has been waiting for the everlasting life to rest by dwelling with us, even though we know that He is not in need of our servitude, but we are in need of His lordship.

- a. **It is the eternal abode** that St. John describes, detailing its dimensions and the materials of which it is constructed in a simple, symbolic style.
- b. **It is to be in the presence of the heavenly Bridegroom** and continually associate with Him.

- c. **It is the assembly of the victorious faithful** “who are considered to be heaven.” **St. Augustine** says, “all the spiritual are, as it were, God’s Heaven ... The Church of God is Heaven”<sup>1361</sup> ... and heaven is the Church.

#### 1446. What is this one Church like?

- a. **“And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes”** (Rev. 21:4). The scholar **Tertullian** says, “‘And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes’ (Rev. 7:17); from the same eyes indeed which had formerly wept, and which might weep again, if the loving-kindness of God did not dry up every fountain of tears.”<sup>1362</sup>
- b. **“There shall be no more death”** (Rev. 21:4). Death ends forever.
- c. **“Nor sorrow nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away”** (Rev. 21:4). The old world has passed away with all its susceptibility to destruction, and everything in eternity becomes new, joyful, and delightful.
- d. **“Then He who sat on the throne said, ‘Behold I make all things new’”** (Rev. 21:5). The soul shall find nothing there capable of boring her.

**St. Gregory of Nyssa** says, “The soul continues to long to see God, and this carries on forever: the soul moving from beginning to beginning, with beginnings that never end.”<sup>1363</sup> Each time a person contemplates God, he sees Him as if for the very first time, as new to his vision, and his longing to worship Him and look upon Him only increases, continuing in this manner without end.

He goes on to emphasize that none shall receive the eternal inheritance save only those who strive patiently, so He says, “He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son” (Rev. 21:7). As for those who neither strive nor believe, they have no portion with Him, for He says, “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8). He begins this bitter inventory with “the cowardly,” those who deny the faith fearing for their temporal life; these are the most wicked of categories. Following them are the “unbelieving,” for it is impossible to please Him without faith. Next come the evildoers, the “abominable, etc.,” who are believers in name but commit actions that do not correspond to the faith. Finally, he focuses on the liars, saying “all liars”; by lying he means those who cheat and deceive in their dealings and conversation.

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<sup>1361</sup> St. Augustine of Hippo, *Our Lord’s Sermon on the Mount* 1.6.17 (NPNF I/6:281).

<sup>1362</sup> Tertullian, *On the Resurrection* 58 (ANF 3:590).

<sup>1363</sup> See *The Light Magazine (Megallat al-Nour, Arabic)* 8, 1968. Translators’ Note: Cf. St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on The Song of Songs*, ed., Brian E. Daley S.J. and John T. Fitzgerald, trans., Richard A. Norris Jr. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2012) 5, 11: pp. 171–173, 339.

### 1447. What does “the holy Church” mean?

“Then one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls filled with the seven last plagues, came to me and talked with me, saying, ‘Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife’” (Rev. 21:9). The Lord chose to send one of the angels who held the seven bowls to show the apostle John the holy “bride, the Lamb’s wife,” and to manifest to us the love of those angels towards us and their compassion for humanity; for although they pour out the bowls, they yearn to see humanity in a state of perfect holiness and want to declare this to all. The Church in her holiness will be the subject of adoration by the angels, who will sing with the psalmist, “At Your right hand stands the queen in gold from Ophir” [Ps. 45:9]. Then the Bridegroom Himself, seeing her sublime beauty, whispers to her, saying, “Beloved, you are fair, my love” (Song. 1:15). This heavenly beauty is the holiness of God reflecting from her, and the mystery of her holiness is:

- a. **Her elevation and exaltedness:** “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem” (Rev. 21:10). She is highly exalted, heavenly, and unapproachable by the devil or his army; for they are cast into the fiery lake.
- b. **“Descending out of heaven from God”** (Rev. 21:10). The mystery of her holiness is that she is exalted and “descending out of heaven from God.” In her elevation, no one can ascend to her; and by her descent from heaven, it is declared that God is raising us up to Himself. **St. Augustine**<sup>1364</sup> says that no one can ascend to the fellowship of the heavenly Jerusalem until he believes that his ascension cannot occur through his own power, but only through God’s work. And her descent declares to us that we ought to experience the heavenly life here on earth before the Day of the Lord when we will rise with Him and through Him. **St. Clement of Alexandria** says that we exchange earth for heaven; for through good deeds we become gods,<sup>1365</sup> and by living in a heavenly manner we become as those in heaven.
- c. **“Having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal”** (Rev. 21:11). Her glory is not her own, but the glory of God shining upon her. She is like a crystal receiving the divine glories, and in appearance like a “jasper stone” (Rev. 4:3). Thus, by becoming one with Him and receiving the rays of His glory, we become as a crystal jasper stone. He is the Sun of Righteousness, radiating beauty, and we are like crystals surrounding Him on all sides until our crystal appearance is lost in the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness shining upon us. If each of us is like a crystal, seeing the glory of God in each other, then God has become all in all.

<sup>1364</sup> Doctrines (al-madhahib) 31.

<sup>1365</sup> That is, the image of God is inscribed in us; but we do not thereby become an object of worship. Rather, God reflects His light upon us, and we are illuminated by His light.

**1448. What does “the catholic and apostolic Church” mean?**

“Also she had a great and high wall” (Rev. 21:12). Who is this wall? The psalmist says, “For you are the God of my strength” (Ps. 43:2). God is the fortress of the heavenly Church and her refuge; we dwell in His secret place and rest under His shadow (Ps. 91:1). This wall gathers the whole community of the catholic Church in a perfect unity that no enemy can infiltrate — neither the devil nor his works can divide her or separate her members.

**St. Augustine** says, “Blessed is he who lives in the city from which no friend leaves nor enemy invades!” This is the Church, or the catholic city, whose walls gather the whole community of the Church. It is comprised of the Church of both the Old and New Testaments, and it is apostolic — upon its foundations are engraved the names of the apostles of Christ, for he says, “Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:12–14). The names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the people of the Old Testament, and the names of the twelve apostles of Christ, the people of the New Testament, have been assembled together, for they are one Church. But those of the Jews who separated themselves from her by rejecting the faith no longer have a place, for the spiritual portion of the inheritance of their tribes has been taken away from them and they have become unbelievers.

The twelve gates symbolize the throwing open of the gates in all directions to all the children of the kingdom.<sup>1366</sup> And the distribution of the gates in the four directions is so that none who desire the eternal inheritance should have difficulty attaining it.

**1449. What are the dimensions of the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem?**

St. John the Revelator says, “And he who talked with me had a gold reed to measure the city, its gates and its wall” (Rev. 21:15). The children of the kingdom are known and measured by God and safeguarded by Him. The unit of measurement, the golden reed, is heavenly; for spiritual and heavenly matters cannot be measured except by that which is spiritual and heavenly.

“The city is laid out as a square, its length is as great as its breadth. And he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs, its length, breadth, and height are equal” (Rev. 21:16). It is a square with four equal angles, which symbolize the four gospels upon which it rests, and which elevate the faithful towards the things of heaven and adorn them to become heavenly brides by the power of the word. The dimension of twelve thousand furlongs means

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<sup>1366</sup> Note that we have seen that in several places, the number twelve refers to the kingdom of God.



the children of the kingdom, symbolized by the number twelve, times one thousand, which symbolizes heaven, which can accommodate all the children of the heavenly kingdom.

“Then he measured its wall, one hundred and forty-four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of an angel” (Rev. 21:17). The number one hundred and forty-four refers to the catholic Church which gathers the believers of both testaments: the Church of the Old Testament (twelve) multiplied by the Church of the New Testament (twelve). It is encompassed by one wall and is graced by the One God. The one who measures it is an angel and not an earthly human, so that we do not imagine that the material or the earthly have a place in heaven.

#### **1450. What structures are in the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem?**

**First. The walls of the city.** “The construction of its wall was of jasper, and the city was pure gold, like clear glass” (Rev. 21:18). The city is fenced by God Himself — it is He who preserves it. It is made of pure gold that is like clear glass, heavenly and pure.

The world searches for gold and extracts it from gold mines, in which working conditions many die. Gold is mostly used to create the flashy adornment of golden jewelry or golden statues etc., none of which are essential for human life; and yet people die to procure it. However, gold in the Holy Bible often refers to heavenly glory whereby the believer lives in glory, his whole body is glorified, and his soul is glorified; and the inhabitants of heaven glorify God, for out of us creatures made of dirt He has fashioned beings that glorify God.

Upon the foundations of the Church are the names of the prophets and the apostles who undertook to deliver prophecies and preaching founded on the Christian faith. Their goal was for us to live by the apostolic biblical faith that grants inner joy, liberation from the love of material things, and salvation from every sin and wicked desire.

“The foundations of the wall of the city were adorned with all kinds of precious stones, the first foundation was jasper, the second sapphire, the third chalcedony, the fourth emerald, the fifth sardonyx, the sixth sardius, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst” (Rev. 21:19–20). What does this mean?

- a. These precious stones are symbols of the apostles of Christ, since it is an apostolic Church. The Holy Bible says, “Having being built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself, being the chief cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20).
- b. The precious stones also symbolize the divine virtues that God grants us for our adornment. The divine virtues are the foundation upon which we are built up in eternity, and of which God grants us a token in this life through our striving. But there they shine within us with a heavenly glory. Therefore, the Lord comforts the striving Church by saying, “O you afflicted one, tossed with tempest, and not comforted.

Behold I will lay your stones with colorful gems, and lay your foundations with sapphires. I will make your pinnacles with rubies, your gates of crystal, and all your walls of precious stones ... This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is from Me, says the Lord” (Isa. 54:11, 17).

- c. The number twelve symbolizes the children of the kingdom. Each child of the kingdom is adorned with a divine adornment that differs from that of his fellows but is precious and beautiful. Thus, the members of the Church complete each another in profound unity.

**Second. The gates.** “The twelve gates were twelve pearls: each individual gate was of one pearl” (Rev. 21:21). The Lord Jesus is the pearl of great price for which a person sells all that he has, just to acquire it (Matt. 13:46). All the children of the kingdom who enter the gates have sold the world and bought that pearl.

Further, we find that each side has three gates, which are the Holy Trinity. Thus, on every side the Holy Trinity enlightens the vision of the nations to sell their possessions and acquire eternity, and so enter into the inheritance prepared for them. And some think that the twelve gates also refer to the twelve apostles whom the Lord Jesus — the incomparable Gate [cf. John 10:1–10] — fashions into gates, so that through their preaching all nations may enter into faith in Him.

**Third. The market or thoroughfares.** “And the street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass” (Rev. 21:21). The thoroughfares of the city symbolize a type of righteous person. In any case, the whole city is made of pure gold, meaning it is heavenly and contains no earthly thing; and of transparent glass, meaning it is free of defilement or complication, and in it, there is only simplicity and purity of heart.

**Fourth. The temple.** “But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22).

- a. Of old, God asked the people to construct a tent of meeting [Ex. 40:2] where God met with the people through symbols and shadows. Later, He asked them to build a permanent temple to be the presence of God in the midst of humanity.
- b. But the Jews strayed and rejected the Lord, and the temple was destroyed; but the Lord offered us His Body as a new temple (John 2:19). We became of His flesh and of His bones (Eph. 5:30) and thus we became through Him a holy temple (1 Cor. 3:16–17) and God’s building (1 Cor. 3:9).
- c. At the same time, He passed over to us the bloodless sacrifice on Covenant Thursday, asking us to offer it in the temple of the New Testament, the token of the eternal temple.

- d. Yet the apostle John did not see a temple in eternity — not because there is no temple, but because “The Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple” (Rev. 21:22). This is a temple spacious and inviting, a temple endless and eternal.

**Fifth. Illumination.** “The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of the Lord illuminated it. The Lamb is its light” (Rev. 21:23). Material means of lighting are superfluous once the Lord becomes our sun and lamp (Mal. 4:2).

**Sixth. Glory.** “And the nations of those who are saved shall walk in its light and the kings of the earth bring their glory and honor into it. Its gates shall not be shut at all by day (there shall be no night there). And they shall bring the glory and honor of the nations into it. But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life” (Rev. 21:24–27).

By its illumination and light, it shall light the way for many to journey towards it, for the Lord says, “...Many will come from east and west and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 8:11). They will come in their glory and honor, casting away every worldly glory and temporal honor for its sake. They will come by their own will, not by compulsion or coercion. The gates are open to all, and everyone is invited. God desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. They will come and learn that its doors will never be shut, for it welcomes everyone without distinction between rich and poor, servants and master. They will come in the day, for nothing can enter it in darkness, neither can any worker of what is impure, disgraceful, or deceitful encroach upon it.

#### **1451. What are the pure river of water that proceeds from the throne of God and the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–7)?**

The apostle says, “And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations, and there shall be no more curse” (Rev. 22:1–3).

The scholar **Tertullian** says that we cannot interpret this passage literally. In the eternal life, there are no actual rivers, thoroughfares, or trees. That these descriptions are symbolic is evident from the description of the tree of life — it is *both* in the middle of the main thoroughfare of the city *and* on either side of the river. If we interpret this description literally, how is this possible?

This passage describes a number of important features of the city of God:

**First. The river of life.** For the scholar **Tertullian**, the river is the person of the Lord Christ who quenches the thirst of every soul and is Himself the Lamb who redeemed us. He is also the tree of life that satisfies His children. He is everything to those who are saved.

For **St. Ambrose**, the river is the Holy Spirit from whom none can drink but those who believe in the Lord Christ who said, “‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’ But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive” (John 7:37–39).<sup>1367</sup> This is the Spirit of the Father and the Son, proceeding from the Father and abiding in the Son. The Son sent Him from the Father to rebuke us, sanctify us, and lead us until we arrive at the heavenly wedding. This is the eternal river which has quenched and quenches the thirst of the bride.

The river also refers to the abundance of God’s joyous graces in eternity, which are in fact not things external to Him, but rather the gift of Himself to us for our delight and joy. As the psalmist says, “There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, the holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved” (Ps. 46:4–5).

The river also refers to the peace we will enjoy in the heavenly Jerusalem: “Behold I will extend peace to her like a river ... As one whom his mother comforts, so I will comfort you, and you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. When you see this, your hearts shall be comforted” (Isa. 66:12–14).

**Second. The tree of life.** For **Tikhon the African**, the tree of life symbolizes the holy cross towards which our hands extend to pluck every desirable fruit. Many saints, including **St. Ephrem the Syrian** call the cross the tree of life.<sup>1368</sup> Through the cross, the Lord put death to death, opened paradise to us, gave us His Body and Blood sacrificed for us, and made us children of the blessing and heirs of eternal life. Through the cross, the Holy Spirit accomplishes the holy sacraments by the hands of the priests of the Church. These sacraments are the sustenance of the Church. And we know that the effect of the cross emanates outward, and the people of the New Testament harvest its fruits every day.

In the eternal life we will contemplate the wounds of the risen Lamb, as though slain [Rev. 5:6] and find our satiety therein. For this reason, we find the fruits monthly and continuously; new fruit for us from which we eat and are filled, although at the same time, our hearts are kindled with desire for Him. So we come back to eat of Him and find fruits new to us, and again, we eat and are filled; but again, with the satiety comes an increase in hunger for Him. As the Son of Sirach says, “Whoever eats from Him, returns hungry to Him; and whoever drinks from Him, returns thirsty to Him” (Sir. 24:21).

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<sup>1367</sup> See St. Ambrose of Milan, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.20.154 (NPNF II/10:156).

<sup>1368</sup> See St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Hymns on Nativity* 1, 5 (NPNF II/13:224, 238–240).

Therefore do we stand continuously before the Tree, in wonder and amazement and without boredom. As for the fruits being twelve, this is because the number twelve refers to the children of the kingdom and the fruits are especially for them, each child finding in Him what he needs and what sates him.

All the early Fathers, such as **St. Basil the Great**, **St. Augustine**,<sup>1369</sup> and **John of Damascus**, elaborated on the prosperous state of eternity and the state of satiety that humanity will experience. Being aware of this, the prophet David says, “I would have lost heart, unless I had believed that I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living” (Ps. 27:13).

**Third. Continuous happiness.** “And there shall be no more curse” (Rev. 22:3). Our forefather Adam, who for a time delighted in an earthly paradise, passed down to us the bitterness of life when he was expelled forcibly and groaned under the burden of the curse he bore on his shoulders because of his disobedience. But in eternity, there will be no place for sin or disobedience; all will serve God with perfect obedience, for he says, “but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him” (Rev. 22:3). They serve Him with love and yearn to see Him; and they take pride in His name: “They shall see His face and His name shall be on their foreheads” (Rev. 22:4).

**Fourth. Endless light.**<sup>1370</sup> “There shall be no night there. They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. And they shall reign forever and ever” (Rev. 22:5). The Book of Revelation uses so many expressions to declare to us the illumination of the children of the kingdom, all of which come down to being in the presence of God, “The Sun of righteousness,” who is around them, above them, and encompasses them.

**The Spiritual Elder** says, “I see Them [the Holy Trinity] as one lamp and by its reflection I am illumined. Therefore I marvel at myself and rejoice spiritually that the Source of Life be found in me. This is the summing up of the incorporeal world.”<sup>1371</sup>

**St. Augustine** says, “My God ... You are my light! Open my eyes that I might behold Your divine splendor, that I may walk on my path without stumbling into the snares of the enemy! What is light but You, my God? You are the Light of the children of light. Your day knows no sunset. Your day shines upon Your children that they might not stumble. But those who have gone out from You walk in darkness and dwell in it. Therefore, we cling to You who are the Light of the world! What is our excuse, when we are tempted every day because we are far from You? For everyone who is far from You, O true Light, goes deeper into the

<sup>1369</sup> See St. Augustine, *Contemplations* 26.

<sup>1370</sup> See Fr. Tadros Yacoub Malaty, *Divine Love* (Arabic), second edition, revised and updated (Sporting, Alexandria: St. George’s Coptic Orthodox Church, 2010) *God the Light of the Soul*: pp. 63–78.

<sup>1371</sup> St. John of Dalyatha, *The Letters of John of Dalyatha*, trans., Mary T. Hansbury (Gorgias Press, 2006) 27.1: p. 126.

darkness of sin; and when sin surrounds him, he cannot discern the snares laid for him all along the road!”

Finally, John the Beloved concludes his description of eternal glory saying, “Then he said to me, ‘These words are faithful and true.’ And the Lord God of the holy prophets sent His angel to show His servants the things which must shortly take place. Behold I am coming quickly. Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:6–7). These are the faithful words by which we must abide, for the One who sent them is the God of the prophets who previously informed us of many matters concerning our salvation, and His prophecies were fulfilled. Now He foretells through the angel He sent to show His servants what will shortly take place.

**1452. Why do we read this prophecy when the time is still so far off?**

He answers, “I am coming quickly! Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book” (Rev. 22:7). He warns us not to waste time doubting, but through faith to accept the prophecy and keep its words, that is, its commandments. We are vigilant, awaiting His coming. Therefore, in the First Service of the Midnight Prayer we pray: “Behold the Bridegroom is coming at midnight, blessed is the servant whom He finds watching. But he whom He finds sleeping is unworthy of going with Him. Therefore, take heed, O my soul that you may not fall into deep sleep, and then be cast out of the kingdom. But watch and cry out saying, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy are You, O God, for the sake of the Theotokos, have mercy on us’ ... But watch entreating that you may meet Christ the Lord with rich oil, and He may grant you the wedding of His true and heavenly glory.”

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**ACW** = *Ancient Christian Writers*. Paulist Press.

**ANF** = *Ante-Nicene Fathers*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**NPNF** = *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**FOTC** = *The Fathers of the Church: A New Translation*. Catholic University of America Press.

**LCL** = *Loeb Classical Library*. Harvard University Press.

**LFHCC** = *Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church*. J. G. & F. Rivington, London: John Henry Parker, Oxford.

**LXX** = *Septuagint Translation of the Old Testament (Orthodox Study Bible)*.

**PG** = *Patrologia Graeca*.

**PL** = *Patrologia Latina*.

**PP** = *Popular Patristics*. St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.

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- 926. Can we perform the duties of prayer during work?
- 927. What does each of the canonical hours commemorate?
- 928. What is the Church Fathers’ understanding of praying the Psalms (the prayers of the canonical hours of the Agpeya)?
- 929. What is the role of the psalms in monastic life?
- 930. Do hermits practice the prayers of the canonical hours?

### **4. The Model Prayer**

- 931. Why is the Lord’s Prayer important?
- 932. Why did the Lord Christ bid us to pray the Lord’s Prayer in the plural?
- 933. Why do we address God thus: “Our Father who art in Heaven”?
- 934. Why is the first supplication to the Lord: “Hallowed be thy name”?

935. Why pray “Hallowed be thy name” when He is already holy?
936. Is He not the King of Kings? So why do we pray, “Thy kingdom come”?
937. Why do we say, “Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”? Will God not carry out His will unless we ask Him to do so?
938. What do the words “heaven” and “earth” signify in this expression (Matt. 6:10)?
939. What does He mean by “bread” when He says, “Give us this day our daily (or essential, or tomorrow’s) bread” (Matt. 6:11)?
940. Why does God not forgive us our trespasses unless we also forgive our brethren their trespasses?
941. What does “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” mean?
942. Why do we conclude the Lord’s Prayer by glorifying God with the words, “For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever”?
943. Why does He emphasize: “For if you forgive people their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, and if you do not forgive people their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive you your trespasses” (Matt. 6:14–15)?
944. Why are the supplications in the Lord’s Prayer ordered this way?

#### **5. Prayer of the Mind and Contemplation**

945. Why did St. Aphrahat the Persian sage focus on the internal prayer of the mind?
946. What is the power of the prayer of the mind?
947. What is the hidden (or secret) prayer to which the Lord Christ invites us?
948. Is it sufficient to pray internally with our hearts or minds without uttering words from our mouths, raising hands, or bowing down before God?
949. What are the signs of purity of heart?
950. Why does St. Basil the Great insist on the prayer of the mind, especially for monastics?
951. What is prayer of the mind?
952. What does praying in the room mean in the Lord Christ’s words: “But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly” (Matt.6:6)?
953. What is unceasing prayer?
954. What is the connection between unceasing prayer and the virtuous life?
955. Why does the apostle call us to pray without ceasing?
956. Does prayer without ceasing justify a neglect of performing actions?
957. How can one deal with distracting thoughts that disturb prayer?
958. What does “the ear of the heart” mean?
959. What is the tradition of hidden prayer among the monastic Fathers?

#### **6. The Jesus Prayer or the Arrow Prayer**

960. What is the “Jesus Prayer”?
961. Are there other short prayers that can be considered as arrow prayers?
962. Did St. Ephrem the Syrian use arrow prayers?

963. Does the Paradise of the Fathers refer to the Jesus Prayer?
964. What is the story of the Russian pilgrim who longed to enjoy the practice of the Jesus Prayer?
965. How can someone with family commitments implement the practice of this pilgrim?
966. What do the Holy Bible and the Fathers say about the power of the name of our Lord Jesus?
967. How did St. John of Dalyatha practice silent prayer without ceasing?
968. How did St. Isaac the Syrian practice prayer without ceasing?
969. How did the scholar Origen experience the power of invoking the name of Jesus Christ?
970. How did St. Augustine practice continual prayer through the name of Jesus?
971. What does St. Anthony say about the practice of the Jesus Prayer?
972. What did St. Macarius the Great say about the practice of the Jesus Prayer?
973. Did David the prophet practice something similar to the Jesus Prayer?
974. Do the liturgical prayers of the Church invite us to practice the Jesus Prayer?
975. How can we persevere in the practice of the Jesus Prayer?
976. What practical steps can one take to practice the Jesus Prayer?
977. How did the apostles experience the power of the name of Jesus?
978. What role does the name of Jesus play in the knowledge of divine mysteries?

#### **7. Metanoias and Prostrations**

979. What is meant by a metanoia?
980. What does the word metanoia mean?
981. What is the relationship between metanoias and repentance?
982. What is the relationship between metanoias and prayer?
983. What does a believer feel when performing metanoias?
984. How can metanoias quench the fury of anger?
985. What is the value of a metanoia if it lacks love and humility?
986. Is it humiliating to perform metanoias?

#### **8. Holy Worship and the Full Life**

987. What does the Holy Bible mean by fullness and by emptiness?
988. What does the apostle Paul mean by a life of fullness?
989. Why did the Lord Christ not choose Saul of Tarsus to be among His disciples?
990. What is fullness or the life of perfection according to the apostle Paul?
991. How can we, as members of the Church, enjoy fullness or perfection?
992. How can the believer experience fullness or perfection?
993. What things deprive a person of a life of fullness?
994. How should those who enjoy a life of fullness deal with those who are weak?
995. What is the majesty of the ministry of the New Testament and its glory afforded to the faithful?
996. How does God turn all things to the glory of His true believers?

997. What does the apostle mean when he says, “[you] have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (Col. 3:10)?

### **9. Worship and the Fear of the Lord**

998. What are the varieties of fear?

999. Does the fear of the Lord destroy one’s sense of self-esteem?

1000. What effect does the fear of the Lord have on our lives?

1001. Does fearing the Lord mean discounting His compassion?

1002. John says, “Perfect love casts out fear” (1 John 4:18), so why does David the prophet say, “Oh, fear the Lord, you His saints!” (Ps. 34:9)?

1003. Where does “the fear of the Lord” sit on the ladder of the practical life of faith?

1004. What are the sources of the fear of God?

1005. Is the fear of the Lord natural for the soul?

1006. How can the fear of God bring about spiritual growth?

1007. Does the fear of God protect us from evil thoughts?

1008. What is the measure of my fear of the Lord?

1009. What is the extent of the fear of God?

1010. Is fear the first step towards heaven?

1011. How can we counter fear?

1012. Who is able to cast fear away from us?

1013. What is the difference between the fear that love casts out, and the pure fear that endures forever?

1014. How can we not be afraid of the devil?

### **10. Holy Fasting**

1015. Why does the believer need to fast?

1016. What do the Church Fathers say about fasting?

1017. What did the desire for food do to the people of God?

1018. Why did our Lord Jesus choose Moses and Elijah to behold Him and speak with Him at His transfiguration?

1019. What is the link between fasting and the friends of the bridegroom?

1020. Why does the Creator call us to practice the way of the angels?

1021. How does fasting prepare us for spiritual warfare?

1022. Does God expect us to destroy the body when we fast?

1023. What does the prophet when he says, “Consecrate a fast ... call a sacred assembly” (Joel 1:14; 2:15)?

1024. How can the believer offer his fast as a sacrifice of love?

1025. How can we practice fasting so that we are led by love?

1026. How can we practice fasting as a sabbath to the Lord and find rest in Him?

1027. How can we practice fasting as worship in spirit?

1028. What modern medicine’s view of fasting?

1029. What is the purpose of fasting?

- 1030. Why does the Church conclude most of her fasts with a relevant feast?
- 1031. How is our Christ transfigured through the fasting of the Church?
- 1032. What is the trajectory of the Church's thought throughout the Lenten fast?

#### **11. Worship and 'Dying with Christ'**

- 1033. Why do Paul the apostle and so many Church Fathers strongly stress the concept of 'dying with Christ'?
- 1034. If worship is a call to joy, how is dying with Christ related to it?
- 1035. What does the apostle mean by being crucified with the Lord Christ and dying with Him?
- 1036. Was it possible for the Healer of our sicknesses to suffer sickness Himself?
- 1037. How can we imitate the crucified Christ?
- 1038. In what ways did St. Paul experience dying in Christ?
- 1039. What does the apostle mean when he says, "always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus" (2 Cor. 4:10)?
- 1040. How is dying with Christ understood in the life of asceticism?
- 1041. How is dying with Christ understood in the life of preaching and service?

#### **12. Tears in Worship**

- 1042. What do the tears of a believer express?
- 1043. On what occasions, mentioned in the Holy Bible, did the Lord Christ shed tears?
- 1044. What purposes do weeping and tears serve for God's mourning people?
- 1045. What do we learn from David the prophet about the potency of those tears that are acceptable before God?
- 1046. What does the psalmist mean when he says, "You have fed them with the bread of tears, and given them tears to drink in great measure" (Ps. 80:5)?
- 1047. Do tears of longing for God render tears of sorrow in distress unnecessary, and vice versa?
- 1048. What does the psalmist mean when he says, "I have eaten ashes like bread, and mingled my drink with weeping" (Ps. 102:9)?
- 1049. What does the psalmist mean when he says, "Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with Him" (Ps. 126:5-6)?
- 1050. What do the Fathers say about holy tears and the tears of the afflicted?
- 1051. Are there certain limits to the tears of sadness we shed over those who have departed?
- 1052. Should a believer shed tears for a family, community, or city that has abandoned God?
- 1053. What were the hidden places where Jeremiah shed tears for God's fallen flock?

#### **13. Praise and the Heavenly Mindset**

- 1054. What are the blessings of praising God?
- 1055. Why did the Church Fathers find it important to talk about praise?

- 1056. How can we offer a praise of thanksgiving in the midst of harsh circumstances?
- 1057. Is there a particular time for praise?
- 1058. Who can teach me to praise the Lord?
- 1059. How do the Fathers understand praise?
- 1060. How did the Church of the New Testament understand worship through praise in the temple?
- 1061. Which Church Fathers composed praises and Church songs through the ages?
- 1062. What is the role of St. Mary as someone who praises God?
- 1063. Why is David the prophet called “the sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Sam. 23:1)?
- 1064. Why does David call on heavenly beings and those who are silent to praise?
- 1065. Does the Lord need human praise?

**14. Church Hymns and the Heavenly Mindset**

- 1066. What is the difference between praises and Church Hymns?
- 1067. What features do praises and Church Hymns have in common?
- 1068. Why do we cherish Coptic Church Hymns? Is it permissible to translate them into the language understood by the people?
- 1069. Are rites and Church Hymns necessary in the Church? Do they impact on our salvation and eternity?
- 1070. What tunes are used by the Coptic Church in her worship?
- 1071. Why are Church Hymns sometimes chanted in an abbreviated short tune and sometimes in a long tune?
- 1072. Are Church Hymns merely a heritage we preserve?

**15. The Coptic Church Calendar and Joyful Daily Life in the Lord**

- 1073. What is the purpose of the Church calendar?
- 1074. What themes run throughout the Church calendar?
- 1075. What is the benefit of the annual Church calendar?
- 1076. What is the Coptic Church calendar cycle?
- 1077. What is the daily Church cycle?
- 1078. What is the weekly Church cycle?
- 1079. What is the monthly Church cycle?
- 1080. What is the annual Church cycle?
- 1081. What are the major feasts of our Lord?
- 1082. What are the minor feasts of the Lord?
- 1083. Why did Moses and Elijah appear at the Lord’s Transfiguration?
- 1084. What are the feasts of the Theotokos, the Mother of God?
- 1085. What are the feasts of saints?
- 1086. Why do we celebrate the consecration of churches?
- 1087. What are the communal fasts of the Church?
- 1088. What is the relationship between the Coptic calendar and the ancient Egyptian calendar?

1089. What is the difference between the ancient Egyptian calendar and the Julian calendar?
1090. What connection is there between the Alexandrian Computus (Epact) and the Christian Pascha?
1091. What connection is there between the Coptic calendar and the ancient Egyptian calendar?
1092. What are the names of the Coptic months?
1093. How do we celebrate the New Year?
1094. How can we make our celebrations a fruitful experience?
1095. What are the most important fixed feasts in the Coptic calendar?
1096. What are the most important occasions in the month of Thout?
1097. What are the most important occasions in the month of Paope?
1098. What are the most important occasions in the month of Hathor?
1099. What are the most important occasions in the month of Koiak (Kiahk, the month of vigil and praise)?
1100. What are the most important occasions in the month of Tobe?
1101. What are the most important occasions in the month of Meshir?
1102. What are the most important occasions in the month of Paremhotep?
1103. What are the most important occasions in the month of Parmoute?
1104. What are the most important occasions in the month of Pashons?
1105. What are the most important occasions in the month of Paone?
1106. What are the most important occasions in the month of Epep?
1107. What are the most important occasions in the month of Mesore?
1108. What are the most important occasions in the Little Month or Pi Kogi?
1109. What are the moveable occasions that depend on the date of the Feast of the Resurrection (Christian Pascha) each year?
1110. What is Holy Week or Passion Week (the week of the Christian Pascha)?
1111. What are the Holy Fifty Days following the Feast of the Resurrection?
1112. What connection is there between the Church calendar and the Bridegroom who is the joy of every heart?

## **Book 5: The Believer and the Heavenly Hosts**

### **1. The Creation of the Spiritual World**

1113. What is the spiritual world?
1114. Who are the angels?
1115. Why were they called angels?
1116. Is it necessary to know about the nature of heavenly beings, whether good or evil?
1117. Why does Scripture talk about the heavenly hosts?
1118. Are we each assigned a 'guardian angel'?
1119. Do all Jewish sects believe in the existence of angels?



- 1120. How many angels are there?
- 1121. Are all angels good?
- 1122. When were angels created? And how were they created?
- 1123. Why was the Bible concluded with the book of Revelation, which frequently referred to the heavenly hosts?
- 1124. Is the nature of angels spiritual, incorporeal, and eternal?
- 1125. Do angels have free will?

## **2. Our Companionship with the Heavenly Hosts**

- 1126. Do the heavenly hosts cease from praising God in order to pray for us and intercede on our behalf?
- 1127. Why do we celebrate feasts for the heavenly beings?
- 1128. What are the characteristics of heavenly beings?
- 1129. Do angels have a certain form?
- 1130. Are they rational beings that exist independently, even though they do not have a physical body?
- 1131. Why did God create angels?
- 1132. Why were angels created before humans?
- 1133. Can a human see angels?
- 1134. What is the food of Angels?
- 1135. Are angels subject to judgment?
- 1136. Do angels have a role in the life of the Church?
- 1137. Why do the angels rejoice when the faithful gather together?

## **3. The Order of the Heavenly Hosts**

- 1138. Are there characteristics that are common to all the heavenly ranks?
- 1139. Can we distinguish between the heavenly ranks?
- 1140. What do we learn from the book, “The Celestial Hierarchy”?
- 1141. What do we know about the first rank, which includes the seraphim, the cherubim, and the thrones?
- 1142. What do we know about the seraphim?
- 1143. What do we know about the cherubim?
- 1144. What does St. Jacob of Sarug say about the cherubim as the chariot of God?
- 1145. Why did God appoint a cherub to guard the way to Paradise?
- 1146. Why were two golden cherubim placed upon the Ark of the Covenant?
- 1147. Why did God grant the prophet Ezekiel a vision of the divine chariot?
- 1148. How did He who sits upon the Cherubim come to be in a manger and in the embrace of St. Mary?
- 1149. What do we know about the “seats” or “thrones”?
- 1150. What do we know about how the chariot of the four living creatures moves?
- 1151. Why does the Holy Bible mention the four living creatures in both Testaments?
- 1152. What are the characteristics of the four living creatures?
- 1153. What do we know about the twenty-four presbyters (Rev. 4:4)?

- 1154. What do we know about the second rank, which includes the dominions, the lordships, and the powers?
- 1155. What do we know about the third rank, which includes the principalities, the archangels, and the angels?
- 1156. What do we know about the archangel Michael?
- 1157. What do we know about the archangel Michael's war against the devil?
- 1158. Were there other contentions between the archangel Michael, and the devil and his kingdom?
- 1159. When do we celebrate the feast of the archangel Michael?
- 1160. Why do some call the archangel Michael "the angel of the resurrection of the Lord Christ"?
- 1161. Why do some refer to the archangel Michael as "the angel of the general resurrection"?
- 1162. What do we know about the archangel Gabriel?
- 1163. What is the role of the archangel Gabriel, as it is described in the Book of Daniel?
- 1164. What role did the archangel Gabriel play in the annunciation of the incarnation?
- 1165. What do we know about the archangel Raphael?
- 1166. What do we know about the archangel Suriel?
- 1167. Who are the remainder of the seven archangels?

#### **4. The Devil Has No Authority Over Us**

- 1168. Who are the evil angels?
- 1169. What was the state of the devil before his fall?
- 1170. Is the devil a real entity?
- 1171. Is the world filled with angels and demons?
- 1172. What is the sin of the angels?
- 1173. Where do evil angels dwell?
- 1174. Were evil angels created with a different nature to that of the good angels?
- 1175. Why are evil angels called "devils," or slanderers and deceivers?
- 1176. Did the Lord Christ mention the devil and his angels?
- 1177. How can we escape the snares of the devil?
- 1178. Who leads us in our battle against the devil?
- 1179. What do these words mean: "Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air" (1 Cor. 9:26)?
- 1180. Who is stronger: the believer or the devil?
- 1181. What do these words mean: "Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens?" (Job 41:5)?
- 1182. How did the Lord Christ subjugate the devil?
- 1183. How does our Christ recompense us for the losses we have suffered?
- 1184. Why did God not expel the devil from the world?

## **Book 6: Christian Concepts and Everyday Life**

### **1. Christian Virtues**

- 1185. What is the connection between virtues and life in Christ?
- 1186. What is St. Paul's understanding of Christian virtues?
- 1187. What are the most important virtues that characterize the Christian person?

### **2. The Virtue of Discernment and Illumination**

- 1188. What is Christian virtue?
- 1189. How does Christianity understand holiness?
- 1190. How can we acquire holiness and discernment?
- 1191. To what extent can we grow in virtue with the spirit of discernment?
- 1192. What do the Church Fathers consider to be the most important virtues?
- 1193. What does the Holy Bible say about discernment and insight?
- 1194. Who can grant us the spirit of illumination or discernment?
- 1195. What is the relationship between the human mind and the spirit of discernment?
- 1196. Does one's level of discernment depend on one's age?
- 1197. What is the link between discernment and moderation?
- 1198. How might we summarize Abba Moses' advice regarding discernment?

### **3. The Virtue of Obedience**

- 1199. Why do some people resent obedience?
- 1200. Does obedience imply weakness of character?
- 1201. Who is the greatest?
- 1202. Is obedience a sign that one shares the attributes of our Lord Jesus Christ?
- 1203. What is the nature of a ruler or leader?
- 1204. How do we understand obedience in our meek Christ?
- 1205. Do we listen to the voice of our Beloved?!
- 1206. How can we practice obedience if we are simple in knowledge?
- 1207. Shall we not obey the voice of the King of Kings?
- 1208. What do you think of an obedient person?
- 1209. Are children, and those who are meant to fully obey those over them, obligated to blindly obey commands that are contrary to a divine command?
- 1210. What does St. Basil think about obeying what is contrary to a divine commandment?
- 1211. What should a believer do if he asks someone to do something and that person wants to challenge that request?
- 1212. What should a believer do if he notices that someone in authority is violating a divine commandment?
- 1213. Why do we need a civil state, with laws and leaders to be obeyed?
- 1214. What is the Christian attitude towards the earthly city and the city of God?
- 1215. What are the duties of citizens towards their state?
- 1216. What do we consider to be the ideal civic authority?
- 1217. What does the apostle Paul say about submission to authorities in the Lord?

1218. What does the apostle mean when he says, “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves” (Rom. 13:1–2)?

1219. What are the roles of civil and Church leaders?

1220. What are the limits of the role of the Church and the Christian in politics?

1221. What is the stance of the Church and the believer towards corruption?

1222. What is the virtue of honoring parents?

#### **4. The Virtues of Chastity and Purity**

1223. What are the virtues of chastity and purity?

1224. How did purity, innocence, and chastity attract pagans to accept the Christian faith in the early Church?

1225. Can I live chastely?

1226. What is the life of chastity?

1227. If He wished us to be holy, why did He give us a body with such instincts?

1228. What do these words of the apostle mean: “I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16)?

1229. Why do I not live a chaste life even though I am a believer and the Holy Spirit dwells in me?

1230. What practical steps can help one to overcome?

1231. What does St. Augustine say about chastity of heart?

1232. What is our attitude towards evil thoughts?

1233. Will our war against lust come to an end?

1234. What is the chastity of striving?

1235. What is the role of the Law in revealing our lusts?

1236. What is the role of grace in our striving?

1237. How do we understand the concept of “living after the flesh”?

1238. Why does it say, “For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14)?

1239. What are some of the false excuses we use to justify giving in to our desires?

1240. Is the body inherently evil as the Manicheans taught?

1241. What should we ask of God, that we may experience purity and chastity?

1242. How should we deal with thoughts that creep into our minds?

#### **5. Vices or Evils**

1243. What does ‘vice’ mean?

1244. How are virtues and vices related to each other?

1245. How should the believer understand the presence of evil?

1246. Why do evil people reject divine will?

1247. If different people obviously have different personalities, why do we lay the blame on the will?

1248. Does the deceitful devil have binding authority over humanity?

- 1249. Do we find lists of vices in the writings of the early Church?
- 1250. What are the types and manner of the vices according to St. John Cassian (or Abba Serapion)?
- 1251. Are the vices connected to each other?
- 1252. Does the enemy of good attack all people in the same way?
- 1253. To what extent is it helpful to identify the particular vice attacking us?
- 1254. How can we summarize the principles in St. Sarapion's exhortation regarding vices in St. John Cassian's Conference with him?

#### **6. Christian Faith and Human Culture**

- 1255. In what way was the early Church engaged with the society around it?
- 1256. What are the characteristics of the social principles of the Holy Bible?
- 1257. What approach did the early Church take, as exemplified by the trilogy of St. Clement of Alexandria?
- 1258. What is the Christian faith's perspective on the many different human cultures?
- 1259. What is the Christian faith's perspective on the human mind?
- 1260. How did the Church pave the way for the world to open the doors of education to all?
- 1261. What is the New Testament Church's perspective on philosophy and knowledge?
- 1262. Were the Christians a sect that was isolated from society?
- 1263. Is the role of faith to criticize culture or to sanctify it?
- 1264. Was the Christianity of the era of the early Church Fathers based on literary creativity?
- 1265. What was the early Church's attitude towards theaters, stadiums, and floral wreaths?

#### **7. The Relationship Between Church and State**

- 1266. What is the Church's attitude towards civil, judicial, and military authorities?
- 1267. What was the Church Fathers' attitude towards the emperors who persecuted the faith and towards the Roman army?
- 1268. Did Christians refrain from joining the military out of hatred for the Romans?
- 1269. Is it appropriate for the Church to pray for the state even if that state opposes the Church and the faithful?
- 1270. What are the obligations of Christians towards the state?
- 1271. Is the life of a Christian the life of a good citizen?
- 1272. What is the Christian attitude towards rulers?
- 1273. Can the Church consider itself a kind of state?
- 1274. Were early Christian communities well organized?

#### **8. Christian Faith and Military Service**

- 1275. What was the Church's view of military service in the era before Constantine?
- 1276. What is the New Testament Church's view of war?
- 1277. What are the views of St. Clement of Rome on participating in military service?

1278. What are the views of St. Justin Martyr (c. 150 A. D.) on participating in military service?
1279. What are the views of Athenagoras (second century) on participating in military service?
1280. What are the views of Tertullian (c. 160–220 A. D.) on participating in military service?
1281. What are the views of St. Irenaeus of Lyon on participating in military service?
1282. What are the views of St. Clement of Alexandria on participating in military service?
1283. What are the views of Minucius Felix on participating in military service?
1284. What are the views of St. Cyprian of Carthage (departed 258 A. D.) on participating in military service?
1285. What are the views of the scholar Origen on participating in military service?
1286. What are the views of St. Dionysius of Alexandria on participating in military service?
1287. What are the views of Arnobius (died around 330 A. D.) on participating in military service?
1288. What are the views of Lactantius (c. 240–320 A. D.) on participating in military service?
1289. What can we learn from the dialogues between the martyrs and rulers?
1290. What were the Church’s views on participating in military service after the reign of the Emperor Constantine?
1291. What were the views of the Council of Arles in 314 and the Council of Nicaea in 325 on participating in military service?
1292. What are the views of St. Basil the Great (c. 326–379) on participating in military service?
1293. What are the views of St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397) on participating in military service?
1294. What are the views of St. Augustine (354–430 A. D.) on participating in military service?
1295. What are the views of St. John Cassian on participating in military service?

## **9. Christian Faith and Social and Familial Relationships**

1296. What is the extent of the believer’s relationship with his family and his brothers and sisters in humanity?
1297. Are social relationships necessary?
1298. What motivates positive relationships?
1299. Is it permissible to defend oneself, one’s family, and one’s homeland?
1300. How did the Law of Moses endeavor to raise humanity to levels of greater righteousness?
1301. What are the limits of chastisement in the New Testament?
1302. What is meant by “the right cheek” and “the other cheek” [Matt. 5:39]?

- 1303. What is St. Ambrose's stance on self-defense?
- 1304. What is the Christian attitude towards the legal system?
- 1305. What is Christian view of judicial rulings against the innocent and the guilty?

#### **10. Social Cohesion**

- 1306. What is the Christian understanding of social cohesion?
- 1307. What is Christian understanding of charitable organizations?
- 1308. What is the foundation of the social work of the Church?
- 1309. How can communion be practiced amongst the faithful?

#### **11. Christian Faith and Social Class**

- 1310. How did Christianity promote mutual respect among all social classes?
- 1311. Do believers carry on their own individual work?
- 1312. Was labor toilsome before the fall of Adam and Eve?
- 1313. Must a Christian work for the sake of others?
- 1314. Are there certain occupations from which Christians are prohibited?
- 1315. Why did St. John Chrysostom rebuke the wealthy?
- 1316. What attracted slaves and captives to the early Church?
- 1317. What do the Church Fathers say about slavery?
- 1318. On what foundations was the revolution begun by St. Gregory of Nyssa built?

#### **12. Christian Faith and Liberty**

- 1319. Did God grant free will to all rational creatures, both the heavenly and the earthly?
- 1320. Why should we ask God for help instead of striving for victory over temptations ourselves, if we can do all things? Why should we strive to live in righteousness when the ability to do so rests only in God's hands?
- 1321. What is the relationship between free will and the kingdom of God that is within us through divine grace?
- 1322. What is the role of divine grace in sanctifying the will and opposing the role of the devil in corrupting it?
- 1323. What is the 'steering wheel' that pilots the human will?
- 1324. Why does St. Clement of Alexandria criticize paganism?
- 1325. Why does the believer accept martyrdom with joy?
- 1326. What is the role of free will in a person's life?
- 1327. Is free will a gift or a responsibility?
- 1328. What is the meaning of "It is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy" (Rom. 9:16)?
- 1329. How do faith and divine grace relate to free will?
- 1330. Does being a servant of God constrain free will?
- 1331. Does baptism confer freedom upon us?

#### **13. Wealth and the Wealthy in the Christian Faith**

- 1332. Do the believer have the right to own private property?
- 1333. Is private ownership evil?

- 1334. Does the Church disapprove of the right of an individual to private ownership?
- 1335. Why is it that some things are owned by all while others are owned privately?
- 1336. Is not the right to private property absolute?
- 1337. Imitate the fruitful earth.
- 1338. What should a believer's attitude to private ownership be?
- 1339. Why are some of the Fathers uncomfortable with the terms, "mine and yours"?
- 1340. How can we be faithful in earthly matters?
- 1341. How did the faith remedy the world's economic problems?
- 1342. Can the wealthy be saved?
- 1343. What is our motive for giving?
- 1344. What is our motive for showing hospitality to strangers?
- 1345. What do the Fathers say about those refuse to give?
- 1346. What do the Fathers say about those who love to give?
- 1347. Do we need those in need?

#### **14. Science and Faith**

- 1348. What is the purpose of the Holy Bible? And what is the purpose of modern science?
- 1349. Why didn't God reveal all scientific facts from the beginning of creation to our ancestors Adam and Eve?
- 1350. What do the Church Fathers say about the six days of creation?
- 1351. How do some western scholars view the contents of the Book of Genesis?
- 1352. What does the word "day" [yom] mean in the first chapter of Genesis?
- 1353. What does the word "day" [yom] mean in other parts of the Holy Bible?
- 1354. Did God rest from His work for humanity after the days of creation?
- 1355. What do the introductory words of the Book of Genesis mean: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth"?
- 1356. Does everything mentioned in the Holy Bible agree with the findings of modern science?

### **Book 7: Eschatology and the After Life**

#### **1. The Gift of Death and the Resurrected Life in Christ**

- 1357. What is the Christian understanding of death?
- 1358. What is the believer's view of death?
- 1359. What kinds of death are there?
- 1360. How did Christianity respond to the attitudes of pagan philosophy towards death?
- 1361. What was the pagan view of the doctrine of resurrection?
- 1362. What did Athenagoras the philosopher and dean of the School of Alexandria say about the resurrection of the dead?
- 1363. Why did pagans desecrate the bodies of the martyrs?
- 1364. Why do the faithful have no fear of death?
- 1365. What should occupy our thoughts when we come to leave this world?



- 1366. How can we not be afraid of death?
- 1367. Why does the Lord not abolish physical death for His faithful in this world?
- 1368. Is there any possibility of repentance after death?
- 1369. Who carries the soul once it has departed from the body?

## **2. The Sacred Pain of Loss**

- 1370. Should we ignore the sacred pain of loss?
- 1371. How can we overcome the pain of separation?

## **3. Millennialism (Chiliasm)**

- 1372. What is meant by Satan being bound for a thousand years (Rev. 20:1–3)?
- 1373. What is meant by the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4–6)?
- 1374. Why do some of the writings of the early Church speak of a literal millennium?
- 1375. What was the position of the School of Alexandria on this view in the second century?
- 1376. What is the teaching of the Holy Bible and sacred tradition regarding Millennialism?
- 1377. What Millennialist doctrines do some contemporary denominations teach?
- 1378. What does the release of Satan at the end of times mean?
- 1379. What is the millennial kingdom? And what is its true meaning?

## **4. The Two Comings and the Rapture**

- 1380. What do the Holy Bible and Church Tradition say about the two comings?
- 1381. What is Satan’s attitude towards the second coming of Christ?
- 1382. What is the faithful’s attitude towards the devil who opposes the Lord Christ and tries to pervert His second coming?
- 1383. How does the antichrist pave the way for humanity to accept him? And what are the signs of his coming?
- 1384. What signs will precede the second coming of Jesus Christ?
- 1385. Will the rapture of the faithful occur before the coming of the antichrist?
- 1386. What is the origin of the term “caught up” in 1 Thess. 4:17 and how did it evolve?
- 1387. What does the idea of the rapture mean according to John Derby, who adopted it in the early nineteenth century?
- 1388. What does it mean to be “caught up”?
- 1389. Do we know when His second coming will happen?
- 1390. What will be the state of the soul after it departs from the body and until the day of the Lord’s final coming?
- 1391. What does the Holy Bible say about the Day of Judgment?
- 1392. What does the Holy Bible say about the eternal kingdom of God?
- 1393. Is the Lord coming soon?
- 1394. How is it possible for the body that has decomposed to return and be reunited with the soul?
- 1395. Will every human being rise?

1396. What is the state of the soul in the period between her departure from the body and the day of the resurrection?
1397. Why does the soul not enjoy its final destiny immediately after her departure from the body?
1398. Why do we say that the souls of the righteous taste blessings before the Last Day?
1399. Do the righteous meet the Lord Christ face to face immediately after death?
1400. What is the eternal life that the righteous enjoy?
1401. What is the source of this supreme joy?
1402. Does the body partake of eternal joy together with the soul?
1403. Will all the righteous be equal in glory?
1404. What is the portion of the defiant who refuse to believe?
1405. Why does God allow eternal suffering for the wicked?
1406. What do we gain from contemplating death, resurrection, the Great Day of the Lord, and eternal life or eternal suffering?
1407. What are we taught about the end of time?
1408. What are we taught about the end of time according to holy Tradition?

#### **5. The Final Judgment**

1409. What does the New Testament say about the Final Judgment?
1410. What does the Old Testament say about the Final Judgment?
1411. What blessings shall the faithful who are righteous enjoy?
1412. How can we behold God?
1413. On the Day of Judgment, what tribulations shall befall the wicked who refuse to return to God?
1414. What do the Church Fathers say about the troubles on the Day of Judgment that will befall the wicked who refuse to return to God?
1415. How can we prepare for the Day of Judgment?

#### **6. The Resurrected Body**


1416. What is the dialogue that takes place between the soul and the body at the moment of their separation?
1417. How are the body and soul of a righteous person reunited on the Great Day of the Lord?
1418. How shall the body and soul of an evil person be reunited, given that he has not given himself a chance to return to God?
1419. How are the dead raised? And what body will they have? (1 Cor. 15:35).
1420. Has God given us any real-life examples to assure us of the glorious resurrection of the body?
1421. What is God's will for our bodies when they are raised from the dead?
1422. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, "There are also celestial bodies and terrestrial bodies; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another" (1 Cor. 15:40)?

1423. Will all the faithful be equal in eternal glory?
1424. What is the nature of the resurrected body and what are its characteristics?
1425. Is the body that will rise other than the body that we have now in this world?
1426. Which comes first, the natural body or the spiritual body?
1427. To whom do we cling: the earthly person or the heavenly Lord?
1428. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly” (1 Corinthians 15:48)?
1429. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Cor. 15:49)?
1430. What does the apostle Paul mean when he says, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption” (1 Cor. 15:50)?
1431. What does the apostle Paul mean by “the last trumpet”?
1432. How does death lose its authority?
1433. What is the sting of death?
1434. How do we obtain victory over sin and death?

#### **7. Heaven and the Jerusalem Above**

1435. What do we mean by the word “heaven”?
1436. How can we know that heaven is real?
1437. What does this mean: “But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven for it is God’s throne; nor by the earth for it is His footstool” (Matt. 5:34–35)?
1438. Is nature a witness to the reality of heaven?
1439. Are there any contemporary witnesses to the faithful challenging death and to their joy and that of their families in the face of martyrdom?
1440. What is the heavenly perspective on the recent spate of bombings of churches?
1441. How does St. John conclude the Book of Revelation, regarding the Day of the Lord?
1442. What is meant by “a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Rev. 21:1)?
1443. What are the characteristics of the heavenly Church?
1444. Why is it called “the city” (Rev. 21:2)?
1445. How did the apostle John transmit the heavenly voice?
1446. What is this one Church like?
1447. What does “the holy Church” mean?
1448. What does “the catholic and apostolic Church” mean?
1449. What are the dimensions of the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem?
1450. What structures are in the city of God, the heavenly Jerusalem?
1451. What are the pure river of water that proceeds from the throne of God and the tree of life (Rev. 22:1–7)?
1452. Why do we read this prophecy when the time is still so far off?





This Coptic Orthodox Catechism in two volumes is important for every believer, regardless of their background or nationality. It is offered with the prayer that it may help those who read it to become sincere children of God with hearts inflamed with love for all humanity; yes, even for those who persecute the Church. It is intended to inspire the reader to experience the heavenly life, here and now on earth; to practice upright faith; and to grow in the knowledge of Christ Jesus. These two volumes contain over 1,400 questions and answers. I hope that future generations will re-present its contents in new ways that are more relevant and effective within the unique environment and culture of each Church community outside Egypt, while always remaining faithful to the authentic spirit of Orthodox Christianity.

Fr. Tadros Y. Malaty

